

THE IMPERISHABLE HEART

JAMES CRAIG BUCHANAN

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The Imperishable Heart

And Other Pulpit Addresses

BY

JAMES CRAIG BUCHANAN, M. A.



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To

MY MOTHER

and to the Memory of

MY FATHER

without whose spiritual nurture
—as without their natural parenthood—
these Addresses
could not have been.

PREFACE

These Addresses have been selected from those prepared in the course of my usual week-to-week ministrations as preacher and pastor.

The Addresses appear here as nearly as possible word for word as they were delivered.

My hearty thanks are due to the Rev. Wm. H. Boocock for wise and brotherly counsel regarding the publication of these addresses; also to another friend, who shall be nameless here, but who dare not deny me the privilege of acknowledging his kindness on this page.

J. C. B.

First Presbyterian Church,
Gowanda, New York.
January 1, 1917.

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"The soul may be trusted to the end." . . .

—EMERSON.

"Faith is a certitude without proofs. Being a certitude,
it is an energetic principle of action. . . .

Faith is a sentiment, for it is a hope; it is an instinct,
for it precedes all outward instruction.

Faith is the heritage of the individual at birth; it is that
which binds him to the whole of being." . . .

—AMIEL.

"But where will God be absent? In His face
Is light; but in His shadow healing, too." . . .

—BROWNING.

"I should bear false witness if I did not declare life happy."
py."

—STEVENSON.

"The Love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

. . .

—ST. PAUL.

The Imperishable Heart

I

THE IMPERISHABLE HEART

"Your heart shall live for ever."—PSALM XXII, 26.

THIS Psalm, like so many of the Psalms, is not all of one hue. It begins with plaint and pleading, and ends with praise and promise. It is, in the first part of it, the cry of a sorely-trying and much-thwarted life; but suddenly (at the 22nd verse) the tone changes, and the poem tells of prayer answered and of ground for gratitude and of good days ahead: "The meek shall eat and be satisfied; they shall praise the Lord that seek Him; your heart shall live for ever."

Whether the words of our text were spoken to an individual or to the nation as a whole, matters little. The suggestion is the same in either case. The life of the God-trusting soul—or of the God-trusting people—is secure. The essentials of their lives cannot be destroyed. The "heart" of their experiences, of their aspirations, of their joys, of their achievements in righteousness and usefulness is immortal, and cannot die: "Your heart shall live for ever."

It is told of the ancient Scottish king, Robert the Bruce, that, when he died, his heart was cut out and placed in a silver casket by one of the fiery Douglasses: and wherever that casket went—with its precious contents—courage went with the army. And, when James Douglas was

wounded to the death, he untied the casket from his own neck and threw it into the midst of his battalion, that the fire and force of the dead Bruce might remain with his men.

If you go over to London, and enter Westminster Abbey by the West door, and turn to the left and walk up the North aisle, you will come to a stone slab let into the floor. In fact you will probably walk over it. It is the tombstone of David Livingstone. But before Livingstone's body had been brought home from Africa to England and buried in the Abbey, what had happened? One May morning, forty-one years ago, the great missionary-explorer had been found by his faithful native servants dead at his bedside—kneeling in the attitude of prayer. Purposing to embalm his body and carry it to the coast, these natives first of all took out the heart and buried it at the foot of a large tree there—in the village of Ilala. A touching, though unconscious, prophecy on the part of these dark sons of Africa that the heart of Livingstone would always remain in the Dark Continent—until that continent should be flooded with the light of the Gospel! And their prophecy has not failed of fulfilment. For, while Livingstone was but one of a mere corporal's guard of Christian missionaries in Africa half a century ago, there are scores of men and women there now—both in the center of the country and on its coasts—opening up the country and letting in the light of civilization and the message of the love of Christ. Truly that missionary heart (although the actual heart of flesh would probably by this time, were it exhumed, be indistinguishable from the dust in which it was buried)—truly that missionary heart 'lives for ever.'

"The mainspring of life," it has been said, "is in the heart."

You know how literally true that is of our physical life. So long as the heart continues to beat, there is life and there is hope.

Similarly, so long as the heart of any experience or of any worthy movement or of any human achievement is not killed out, the thing lives. There is something abiding—something immortal—at the heart of everything that is at all worth while. "Your heart shall live for ever."

My last morning at sea, lately,—just as we were entering Boston harbor—a gentleman sitting at the same breakfast-table with me said, "Well, we may never have another trip across the Atlantic; but nobody can take away this one from us." There was no silly sigh that the voyage was over and done-with—a thing of the past; but a smile of satisfaction that, after all, it could never be over and done-with—could never be a thing of the past. The memory of it, the benefit of it to both body and soul, the passing companionships of it, the whole blessing of it, the "heart" of it, are here for all time. O, my friends, it is a dangerous habit—a faithless habit,—moaning over what has been: the irrevocable past, as it is sometimes phrased. It is not wholly irrevocable,—beyond recall. In various ways it may be recalled. The essentials of our past experiences remain with us,—bound up with what we are and what we think and what we do today. The "heart" of the days gone by is with us still. For the wisdom of God, and the love of God, which are—somehow—at the core of all our experiences, are "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever."

"There shall never be one lost good! What was, shall live as before."

You, my friend of fifty or sixty or seventy, do you mean to tell me that the boyishness-of-it—or the girlishness-of-it—has entirely vanished from your nature; or that you have lost every jot and tittle of the spring of youth? I refuse to believe it: that is, if you are living with your face toward the light and 'waiting on thy God continually.' Don't we read, in one of the praise-Psalms of the 'renewal of youth?' Don't we hear the prophet Isaiah say, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength: they shall mount up with wings as eagles . . . shall *run*, and not be weary;" shall walk, and not faint. And it was not to the youngsters exclusively—it was to all and sundry—that our Saviour said, "Verily I say unto you, Except ye . . . become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven." Yes, mark you, He seems to indicate, there, that it is partly within our own choice and within our own power to retain the best characteristics and the best blessings—to keep the soul—of our earlier days.

There was published, the other day, a book by a British preacher—recently gone to his long home, entitled "The Romance of Preaching:" in which the author says that the great task of the preacher is "keeping the soul of the world alive." Yes, my friends, that is the "joy and crown" of us preachers. Not familiarizing people with names and things, with theories and systems. Nor yet continually nagging at people as to what they should do—and should not do (after all, the majority of people

don't need to be told that). But inspiring people, according to our gift and power. And that, largely, by persuading them that this world as God has made it—with all its sights and sounds, and with all its human experiences, and with its sweet story of the Christ—has a soul to it; that there is good and glory at the heart of it all—something which abides and is alive for evermore (unless we ourselves do the smothering and the killing).

Yes, "*your* heart shall live for ever!" That is the preacher's message to every human life, to every institution that is 'making for righteousness,' and to every good impulse that he may detect in man or woman—or boy or girl.

And, '*their* heart shall live for ever!' That is the message of the preacher to his fellows about their various mortal experiences: about the influences of the flowers and the stars, and their books and their pictures, and their friendships, and their joys and their sorrows.

We need just such a message—all of us. Because, our memories are rather short sometimes, and we are too much occupied—sometimes—with the mere outward trappings of our experiences; and so we feel that many things are slipping away from us, which we would fain keep.

But don't let us get discouraged. For, after all, if the "heart" of a thing "lives" with us, that is the main point.

For instance, I read Emerson frequently. I just revel in those wonderful essays of his. And yet I would not undertake to quote exactly—here and now—more than about three short sentences from Emerson. Well, perhaps I should cultivate a more retentive memory. But I

am not worrying: because I believe I have captured the "heart" of these writings. I think I understand their essential message. They have gripped me, and influenced my whole way of thinking.

I am a great believer, indeed, in people memorizing,—especially young people; and I am mightily glad that I was made, long ago, to get by heart sundry passages of the Great Book here and some of our best Christian hymns. Call it a mechanical type of teaching, if you like: it is immensely useful, and it will be a poor day when our boys and girls get the notion that memorizing is beneath them. All the same, my friends, the chief thing is to "pluck out the heart" of a book—to get the spiritual dynamic of it into our personalities—to make sure that its life energizes within us. We ought to be able to say to the best books—and to this Book above all,—*"Your heart shall live" in me "for ever."* And so it is that Stevenson says somewhere, *"When you have read"* (presumably he means a really worthy and substantial book)—*"when you have read, . . . it is as though you had touched a loyal hand, looked into brave eyes, and made a noble friend; there is another bond on you thenceforward, binding you to life and to the love of virtue."*

And so, my friends, with a great and pure Love. It cannot die. It abides. It 'lives for ever.' It may be sore tried from time to time. It may grow cold occasionally, or clammy with suspicion. It may be scorched, now and again, with the fires of unholy passion,—and be like to turn from love to lust. It may be strained almost to the breaking point, sometimes, for lack of being reciprocated.

And, finally, it may be bereaved—robbed of the mortal comradeship of its beloved. But, if it is a true Love, none of these things can spear the “heart” of it. It lives to all eternity.

“Time cannot age it,
Death cannot slay.”

“Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it.”

O, surely, my friends, that is fact, and not merely rhetoric. Surely we are encouraged to believe that, although separation may continue for a time, we may look for a day of re-union—the day of Love Triumphant.

And so, again, with a great Sorrow. The outward trappings of it—the particular circumstances of it—become things of yesterday. The pressing poignancy of it disappears by and by, and only returns occasionally in the form of a dull ache. Sometimes, indeed, we are almost ashamed of ourselves for having gotten back, so soon after a time of trial, the old smile and the old buoyancy. *That*, however, is of the mercy of God. But, my friends, what we cannot afford to do—what we cannot do, if our spirits are “finely touched . . . to fine issues” and if we have “the smallest scruple of” Nature’s “excellence”—(what we cannot do) is to forget entirely the touch of a chaste and noble sorrow—to let the “heart” of it go. You are playing a perilous part if you are telling people lightly to forget their griefs—to “get over” them. They can’t get over them: at least, they ought not. Let us hope, indeed, that their griefs will not get over them, but get *into* them—become part of their

deepening and expanding life.

There are, perhaps, some sorrows—neither chaste nor noble—which are best forgotten wholly and for ever. But most sorrows, I will say, if we could see to the “heart” of them, are the gift of God; and so their issue is for all time.

And then my friends, as we stand in amazement, or as we kneel in humility, at the Cross of Christ, are we not bound to say, “Your heart shall live for ever”.

Near nineteen centuries ago, now, that instrument of crucifixion was taken down; and we are not sure, at this time of day, of the precise spot where it stood when Jesus hung upon it. But the “heart” of that symbol of Everlasting Love ‘lives for ever.’ The mighty comfort of it we know and prize today. The compulsion of it we feel and respond to—today. What are alleged to be broken pieces of that Cross are still shown to travellers in some of the Cathedrals of Europe: but these are only improbable relics. And, even if we could actually handle the very spars that were pressed by our Saviour’s tortured limbs, what of that? It is not the wood of the cross, it is the worth of the cross we wish to feel. It is the meaning of the great sacrifice on Calvary that we want to know,—and that we may surely know if we read here and if we ask of those who have been “apprehended of Christ Jesus.” It is the meaning of it for suffering and sin-stricken Humanity,—“the Love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” And so, when we speak of “the Cross of Christ,” we are not thinking of an unsightly wooden instrument of torture and shame: what we are thinking of is that Love

whose "breadth and length and depth and height" we cannot, indeed, "comprehend," but whose tenderness and forbearance we have experienced a thousand times, and in whose inspiration the world's best men and women have lived and died.

"It is God; His love looks mighty,
But is mightier than it seems:
'Tis our Father; and His fondness
Goes far out beyond our dreams."

Here, then, brethren, is the conclusion of the whole matter this evening. Make sure that you get to the "heart" of things. Your daily tasks: your reading and your studies: the beauties and bounties of Nature: your friendships: your joys, and your sorrows: your acquaintanceship with the "Strong Son of God"—with His life and teaching—with His Death of Love and Resurrection of Power. Make sure that you get right into the heart of all these things. For GOD is at the heart of them,—His gracious purposes and His immortal Love.

And (need I tell you?) the only way to reach the heart of things, and to discern God's heart-beat there, is to keep your own hearts pure:

"Blessed are the pure in heart:
for they shall see GOD."

II

SOUL TRANSFERENCE

"If your soul were in my soul's stead."—JOB XVI, 4.

THERE are people who mean well, but they don't know how. They have a sort of neighborly instinct—an instinct of helpfulness; but they do not fully understand. Consequently their performances are not as good as their purposes. Why? Because they haven't the faculty (which, by the way, is partly a gift, partly an acquisition)—they haven't the faculty of putting themselves in other people's places, the faculty of understandingly and feelingly 'rejoicing with them that do rejoice and weeping with them that weep.' Their sympathy is, perhaps, sincere enough, but rather superficial: pious enough, perhaps, but lacking in perspective and in power of projection.

Job's three friends were of that class. They meant well, but they didn't know how. They said many true things, many wise things, many wonderful things,—and even some kind things; but, somehow or other, they cut and crushed more than they comforted.

So much so, indeed, that, after they had spoken, each once—and the first of them twice, Job broke out in the bitterness of his soul on this wise, "I have heard many such things: miserable comforters are ye all. . . . I also could speak as ye do; if your soul were in my soul's stead, I could heap up words against you. . . .

But (in such case) I would strengthen you with my mouth, and the moving of my lips should assuage your grief"—not aggravate it.

"If your soul were in my soul's stead!" Ay, *there* was the explanation of their weakness, and the sting of Job's loneliness. They were not in his place; and, moreover, had not sufficiently tried in imagination to put themselves in his place. They were only standing at the portal of Job's grief: they had not sought access to its "secret place." And, unless "spirit with spirit" will meet, there is no fulness of understanding.

"To understand," it has been said, "(to understand) is more difficult than to judge, for understanding is the transference of the mind into the conditions of the object, whereas judgment is simply the enunciation of the individual opinion." Mark that phrase there,—"*the transference of the mind into the conditions of the object:*"—"If your soul were in my soul's stead!"

Not simply, mark you, if you were in my place—if your circumstances were mine and mine yours; but, if your *soul* were in my soul's stead—if you only knew the secret surgings of my heart in all this inexplicable trouble!

Yes, indeed, it is something to know a person's circumstances,—to know how he is placed, and what are his chief encouragements and chief discouragements, and so forth. But that is not enough. We must know, in some degree, the person's Self: his cast of thought, his type of temperament, his tastes (both higher and lower), his heart's desires (both the best of them and the worst of them): in short, his individuality, his inner life, his SOUL-LIFE.

Oh, it is easy enough to pick up information about people, and to know what they say and what they have and what they do—without knowing almost at all what they *are*, as human entities, as Personalities, as Souls. And so, there are people who talk knowingly and glibly, and with an astonishing and almost aggravating familiarity, about the happenings and habits of your life; who, nevertheless, you feel all the time, are hopelessly lacking in insight and do not understand. And there are even people who wish to be kind to you (and, mark you, I say this in no spirit of cynicism)—there are even people who wish to be kind to you, but whose proffered kindness seems, somehow, to rub you the wrong way: because they, again, do not understand, and so succeed only in patronizing—where they had meant to cheer and uplift.

It is so necessary to put ourselves in other people's places—not merely in the sense of 'standing in their shoes' (as it is sometimes phrased), but, if by any means possible, by dwelling in their Souls: not merely by an imagined transference of Place, but by an imagined transference of Personality. "If your soul were in my soul's stead!"

I had a friend in the Old Country, a few years my junior, who used to consult me a good deal about religious beliefs and religious experiences, when I was at the theological seminary stage. Being at that stage, I was young enough and naively egotistical enough, to say very frequently, "If I were you, I would do so and so." One evening, when we were discussing something, and when I had come out with my usual formula, he said quietly, "Yes, but then, you see, *you're not me and I'm not you.*" It

was one of the best things that was ever said to me: one of those obvious things which come, however, with an altogether new flash of illumination when spoken in certain circumstances and at a psychological moment. It set me thinking. It served to increase considerably my store of human thoughtfulness, of charity, of Christian tolerance. It served to remind me that we are not all made after the same pattern; that we have—each of us—our own lives to live,—our own thoughts, our own points of view, our own tastes and temperaments; that, as the Book of Revelation has it, each one of us has a “name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.”

Then, I remember being greatly impressed, years ago, with the reading of an Address which was given to the students of the University of Glasgow by Joseph Chamberlain (then at the height of his power) on the cultivation of the Imagination in our relations with others. That, I dare say, was not the exact *title* of the address; but that was the subject. It was certainly most suggestive and helpful, and I have never happened to see the subject dealt with in the same way since. He began (unless my memory plays me false), by referring to the various possible uses of the imagination. Then he narrowed himself down to this one use, this most humane of all the uses, of the Imagination: namely, trying, by a concentrated and chastened effort of mind, to occupy other people's places, to experience as nearly as possible what they are thinking and planning and suffering and rejoicing in, and so on. It was in a daily newspaper that I read the address, and I did not keep a copy of it. But I have often, often thought of it

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since. Because, while we use our imaginations in all sorts of ways,—frivolously and fantastically, and riotously, and suspiciously; we do not use them anything like often enough in the humane and sympathetic way I am trying to urge upon you this evening,—trying to understand folk's Souls, as well as their Circumstances.

Indeed, friends, some of the Finer Human Sentiments—especially the more Christ-like Sentiments—are simply impossible without this getting of ourselves, perceivingly and humbly and courteously, into the sanctuaries of other people's lives. Such things as Gratitude, Thoughtfulness, Sympathy, Persuasiveness, Forgiveness, Charity: such things as these, in anything like sincerity and depth (I mean), are impossible of attainment without a certain "transference of the mind," without a sort of exchange of Place and Personality—by a sane and sanctified use of the Imagination. Listen to what George Eliot says about "charity towards our stumbling, falling companions in the long . . . journey." "There is but one way," she says, "in which a strong determined soul can learn it—by getting his heart-strings bound round the weak and erring, so that he must share not only the outward consequence of their error, but their inward suffering." Oh, how wise, how gracious, how understanding of that clever woman to say that! And, as with charity, so with such other Finer Sentiments as I have mentioned. Gratitude, for instance. How can you be fairly—not to say generously—grateful, unless you try to appreciate the tenderness-of-soul that prompted your friend's gift to you, or perhaps the sacrifice that made it possible? In particular,

brethren, how can we be half-thankful enough for the Cross of CHRIST, if we do not meditate considerably on the amazing amount of Soul that went with it—on the tender and tenacious Love that made it possible. Some such thought, I fancy, was in the Apostle's mind when he wrote, "That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend . . . what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of "the Love of CHRIST."

"If your soul were in my soul's stead!" Oh, my friends, how different things would be, many ways, if we could only get the pith of that saying into our minds and methods!

How many barbed words would never be spoken! You must have known cases where a bitter word was the last straw, so to speak: the cut that broke a fellow-mortal's nerve and composure. You didn't know that she was weary and worn and all on edge with a harassing day, when you spurted out your sarcasm or your taunt; but it *was* that way, and so it was just one stroke more than she could bear. Perhaps you might have thought?

How many little discourtesies, too, would never take place,—and how many little courtesies would be added over and above!

How many an unsympathetic remark, too, from older to younger or from younger to older, would never find breathing-room, if only younger and older would change places a little more—in thought!

And how many a wayward and disappointing child would be appalled at himself, and would repent in dust

and ashes,—could he but half think himself into his parents' grim experience, into their soreness and shame of heart on his account!

And then, my friends, how in the world are we ever to tackle our social and industrial problems—except by this sort of “transference of mind?” It is not enough to visit factories and mines, and so forth, and see with our eyes of flesh the conditions in which some people have to work. We must use our mind's eyes as well, and try to realize to ourselves how the ambitions and aspirations and finer sentiments of men and women are shaped by their environments and by their kind of day's work. We must not merely put ourselves in their “places;” but also get ourselves, as it were, inside their clothes, and inside their skulls (where the brain is), and inside their breasts (where the heart is). We must, as far as possible, BE THEM (I know that is bad English, but it is the most expressive I can find). We must as far as possible BE THEM. “If your soul were in my soul's stead!” It was Phillips Brooks who said, “You cannot do your duty to the poor by a society, your life must touch their life.”

Now, my friends, perhaps you will say that this thinking ourselves into other people's experiences is a very difficult process.

Well, be it so,—are we not manly and womanly enough, are we not Christian enough, to admit that, if it is difficult, it is all the more worth while?

Besides, it is wonderful what can be done in the way of cultivating this sane and sanctified imagination—this “understanding” human touch.

Pardon me alluding once more to my own experience. At one time, during my former pastorate, I had been calling every day—for a week or so—at a home where a little child lay dying. It came, in course, to the day which was to be her last on earth. We all knew it. Well, as I stood there by the child's bedside, I said to myself, 'What an unspeakable wrench this must be for the father and mother of that little one! What must it be like?' And there and then I fell into a sort of deliberate abstraction, used my imagination to its utmost limit, and thought myself into their position and experience: with the result that, for a moment or two, and by the very gift of God it seemed to me, I **FELT WHAT THEY WERE FEELING**. It was no shadow or semblance. For the short time being, it was the Fact, and I was sure of it. Of course the wrench passed away from my heart almost the moment it had come,—as it did *not* from the parents' hearts. But I had seen the vision. I had felt

"The power of the night, the press of the storm."

And, to say the least of it, I have known, ever since, as I never knew before, the awful desolation that is brought to pass when a Little Child is "taken up" out of a Home. It was a fulfilment, in my case, of the old Prophetic saying, "And a little child shall lead them."

I say, then, it is wonderful what we can do—if we try—in the way of putting ourselves in other people's places, in the way of thinking ourselves into their experiences, in the way of feeling with them—that we may sincerely and helpfully feel for them. Try it, all of you: and you will find how much more interesting, and how much deeper, your lives will become,—and how much more humane and

sympathetic and affectionate. As the Apostle has it, "Look not every man on his own things only, but every man also on the things of others: . . . that ye be like-minded, having the same love, of one accord, of one mind."

And don't you know, brethren, that this was a large part of the charm and the power of JESUS CHRIST Himself? No one needed to say to HIM, "If your soul were in my soul's stead!" He was there already. He "knew what was in man." How adroitly and accurately He read men's minds! How thoughtfully and understandingly and charitably He spelled out the secrets of their hearts! In so much, you remember, that the Samaritan woman, who so direly needed His pity and His grace, hailed her fellow-town's-folk almost gladly with, "Come, see a man, which told me all things that ever I did."

And the Best Friend of human kind, that most searching—but most gentle—Comrade of the human heart, is "the same yesterday, and today, and for ever." So that you and I—each one of us—can say to HIM, with all confidence, "Thou understandest my thought afar off;" and can say to HIM, with whatever penitence—yet with glad assurance (let us hope), "Lord, Thou knowest all things: Thou knowest that I love Thee."

III

THE EVERLASTING NOW

"Behold, now is the accepted time; behold, now is the day of salvation."—II CORINTHIANS VI, 2.

THE Apostle is trying to impress upon the minds of his readers the importance, the dignity, the sanctity of the Gospel Ministry: "the ministry of reconciliation," he calls it. He wishes them to understand, in some measure, the wonderfulness and the winsomeness of the grace of God. Nay more, as they are freely 'receiving' the gift of God's grace, by all means let them not receive it "in vain:" let them take hold of it with both hands, and make it count in their lives. There is nothing to be gained by waiting. The Father was never more willing, and they were never more needy nor more ready, than right now. There can be no more favorable opportunity than the present. There is no more acceptable "time"—no time more likely to be *the* time than today. And so, at this point, the Apostle throws in a parenthesis, quoting from the prophet Isaiah, "For He saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee: behold, Now is the accepted time; behold, Now is the day of salvation."

He throws in that parenthesis. Yes, only a parenthesis: but, like many another Scriptural parenthesis, it has point and pith and power. And the point and pith and power of it are focussed for us in the single word "NOW,"—"Now is the accepted time; . . . Now is the day of

salvation."

"There is a tide in the affairs of men
Which taken at the flood, leads on to fortune;
Omitted, all the voyage of their life
Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

The Golden Age has been put by some in the far past; by others in the far future. Well, if we are to think of the Golden Age as a time of undisturbed ease and unbroken plenty and assured and universal peace, then—obviously—it is either past or to come. But, if we will think and speak of the Golden Age in terms of Opportunity, then we may know for sure that it is always with us—the "Everlasting Now."

Of course, my friends, you will understand that, in the passage before us, St. Paul does not merely mean that the present life is the season of grace, and that there will be no farther opportunity—no 'other chance'—in the life to come. That may or may not be: we cannot tell. But St. Paul here is not speaking theologically. He is speaking humanly and practically: and he says, in effect, The time to take hold of the grace of God and make it count in our lives—the time to follow our best impulses and to do our best work—is always right NOW. No use proposing, like Felix, to wait for "a convenient season." The convenient season is already here.

To be sure, we cannot do everything at once; and there are certain developments of our life-plans and life-tasks that take time and that we should be unwise to hurry. And so we have the word of the Hebrew prophet, "For

the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it:" and this other word of another Hebrew prophet, "He that believeth shall not make haste." Yes, it is a great thing to learn the art of 'waiting.' Jesus Himself said on several occasions, "My time is not yet come;" meaning that the time of the crisis—the day of the Cross—was yet ahead of Him. And so, brethren, in trying to get at the heart of our little text this morning, we must not lose our sense of proportion, nor fail to keep the balance.

But after all has been said about possible misinterpretations of the passage before us, we know perfectly well what it means—in all the incisiveness of it and in all the inclusiveness of it. "NOW is the accepted time; . .

. NOW is the day of salvation." It applies to each and every day of our lives, and to every hour of every day: that the time to grasp and use God's grace, the time to be true to the best that we know, the time to do our best in our best way, the time to 'save' ourselves from all that is unworthy of us, is precisely the time at which we happen to be,—Today and not Tomorrow.

The thing is so obvious, my friends: and yet we blunder along in a series of hopeless procrastinations. We are going to "get around" to this and that *some day*: which means, in ever so many cases, that we *never* get around to it. O, how many letters we have failed to answer, how many helpful words we have failed to speak, how many visits of encouragement we have failed to make, how many 'spoiled chances' are in our records—because we put off until it was too late! "Do it *now*" is the rule for all

such opportunities. "The days," says Emerson, "are ever divine . . . They are of the least pretension, and of the greatest capacity, of anything that exists. They come and go like muffled and veiled figures, sent from a distant friendly party; but they say nothing; and if we do not use the gifts they bring, they carry them as silently away."

To my young friends especially—those of them (I mean) who have some spark of ambition—(to my young friends especially) I should like to say, with the Apostle, "NOW is the accepted time." You wish to excel, I assume, in some direction. You wish to become proficient, as time goes on, in this or that. And, in order to excellence—in order to proficiency, there is so much work to be done: three or four big books to be mastered, or thirty or forty points of detail to become familiar with, or the like. But, you are saying to yourself, there is plenty of time: youth comes but once: some day I'll get down to hard work. No, my young friend, the chances are you will never get down to hard work if you don't DO IT NOW.

Some of the tasks in front of you may look enormous, and may have the reputation of being exceedingly heavy and irksome. Well, to say the least of it, to put off tackling them will not make them any easier. And, moreover, it is wonderful how, once you get clearly under way with a bit of work, many of the apprehended difficulties vanish and much of what you expected would be irksomeness becomes positively exhilaration.

Let me give you a little bit of my own experience (and I know very well that many a preacher could tell you the same sort of thing). When I began my ministry, over in

the Old Country, I used to put off my sermon-writing till dangerously near the end of the week: partly out of a kind of fear, and partly because I seemed to assume that I must wait for the inspiration to take place. The consequence was, a terrible congestion of work in the last forty-eight hours of the week, and not getting to bed till three or four o'clock on Sunday morning. By and by I made up my mind that that would not do: and for several years past I have made it a point to start the sermon-writing each week on Wednesday morning at latest, and—if practicable—on Tuesday morning. Inspiration or no inspiration, message or no message, I sit down and make a start; and then the way opens up marvellously. The consequence has been that, instead of that part of my work as a minister being—as it used to be—a burden and a bore, it is now (with all its exactions and its strain) the joy of my life. And however poor and partial my attempts to preach the Everlasting Gospel may be, I feel, at least, that from week to week I am being fair to myself and fair to you and fair to the Master by 'taking occasion by the hand' and not procrastinating till the eleventh hour. You may take that little frank piece of autobiography for what you think it is worth. Anyhow, when I say to you young people, "Do it now," I speak that I do know.

And then, brethren, when it comes to the higher reaches of life—to our growth in grace—to our distinctively spiritual achievements, unquestionably the time is NOW. No soul of man—good, bad, or indifferent—is standing still. We are all moving,—in some direction or other: *up or down*. Each new day, therefore, takes us a little farther on our way—*up or down*. . . . Don't

you see, then, that if a man happens to be going down, no matter by what apparently slow degrees, the time for him to turn about and get on to the up-grade is Today, not Tomorrow. It will be more difficult—tomorrow. There will be more steps to retrieve—tomorrow. And then, there is always the chance that Tomorrow will be too late. "That thou doest, do quickly." . . . You all remember how Felix said to Paul, as Paul "reasoned" with him "of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come," "Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee." Well, so far as we know the "convenient season" never came. Felix let the opportunity of his life go by for ever.

O yes, for getting into harmony with the will of God—for getting into line with Christ—for making the most of yourself, "NOW is the accepted time; . . . NOW is the day of salvation." . . .

But there are two lines of resistance along which we are mostly all moving. There are two considerations—or sets of circumstances—which are apt to persuade us away from holding and living-by the truth of our text. I mean (to put them briefly) the Trivialities of life and the Trials of life.

There are the Trivialities of life. I mean that some individuals are perpetually imagining—if not hinting—that, were their circumstances more congenial, were their surroundings more inspiring, were their opportunities more conspicuous, they could do immensely better than they are doing at present with their small and trifling tasks. Well, brethren, there are, I believe, some people who are

not in their right places in this world, some people who would certainly do better than they are doing in more congenial and more encouraging situations. But, I tell you, in the vast majority of cases it is precisely where we are—Here and Now—that we mortals must “win our victories or suffer our defeats.” You remember how Jesus said, “He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much.” It has been said of Charles Kingsley (one of the healthiest spirits who ever lived), that “In all things . . . he would do the duty that lay nearest him, believing that *God* had put it nearest him.” Ay, *there* is the secret of success: seeing the hand of God in your life, taking your life-tasks as the appointment of the Father,—no matter how inconspicuous and apparently unimportant your place may be. Lincoln rose to fame and to large usefulness, because he was wise enough and humble-minded enough not to “kick” at having to be brought up in a log-cabin, and because he made the shanty a study and read the world’s best books there. . . . O, my friends, I know well enough how depressing and de-vitalizing some folks’ circumstances are. Don’t think me callous or inconsiderate or unsympathetic: I trust I am not that. But I know what I am talking about: and, I say, the question is just this, if it is inevitable that you cannot at present alter your circumstances, are you going to allow the uncongeniality and the inconspicuousness of your circumstances to take the heart out of you altogether and to make a grumbler and a failure of you, *or* are you saying to yourself, ‘NOW is the accepted time: NOW is the day of my salvation: I will win out in spite of my circumstances; I am

going to be their master, not they mine'? . . . I came across this the other day (it is beautifully wise), "Never fancy you could be something if only you had a different lot and sphere assigned to you. The very things that you most deprecate, as fatal limitations or obstructions, are probably what you most need. What you call hindrances, obstacles, discouragements, are probably God's opportunities."

Then, besides the Trivialities of life, there are the Trials of life blinding us frequently to the supreme importance of TODAY. Especially, I should be inclined to say, the little, oft-repeated vexations of our common days. For we have no difficulty in seeing and understanding that the days of our big trials are important days: yes, 'days of salvation.' But what about the *little* bafflings and worries? You know, the most excruciating discomfort that you could experience would be to be made fast in a particular place and to have water made to drop, drop, drop on the same spot of your naked body for hours and hours together. In fact, that has been a form of torture used by those who have been ingenious in devising such things. What, then, about the little trials that drop, drop, drop on the same spot of your soul every day?—Your little physical disability, it may be,—so that you are never in perfect health and perfect spirits: or the daily nag-nag-nagging in your home, it may be: or your having to work with some one who is perpetually aggravating you by his want of brains or want of heart? And so forth and so on. 'Why!'—you say to yourself—"I shall never make anything of my life, I shall never realize myself, I shall never know the "salvation" of acquiring the mind of Christ,—so long as things

are as they are with me: I must be out of all this first.' But, no, my friend: ten chances to one *never* will you realize yourself—never will you come to the mind of Christ—if you do not at least begin to try right NOW, right in the thick of those daily bafflings and worries. .

. . Besides, as a matter of plain common sense, which is better:—to play the man amid life's irritations and inhospitalities, or to give in and confess oneself beaten?

Mark you this, too, brethren: the heroism of the inconspicuous places must often be, in God's sight, as magnificent and as praiseworthy as the heroism of the conspicuous places. There are scores of young men these days—the flower of their respective countries—winning their laurels on the battlefields of Europe. But they are out with the big battalions, in a big way, and in a big cause. Yes, but what about the mothers and sisters and sweethearts at home, who have bade these young men goodbye with smiles of encouragement which likely cost them days and nights of tears, who are probably living now—many of them—on scant fare, and who never know but what the next news will be that some of their loved ones have been killed in battle and their corpses pushed into the cold trenches? Truly, as the Book says, "Kings of armies did flee apace: and she that tarried at home divided the spoil." Yes, indeed, there is a 'share of the spoil' for you—a share of the honor—a share of Humanity's approval and of God's approval—for you, *right where you are*, if you are hanging-in to your appointed tasks, and bearing bravely "the petty round of irritating concerns and duties."

And so, for each and all of us "NOW is the accepted time; . . . NOW is the day of salvation."

"We need not bid, for cloister'd cell,
Our neighbor and our work farewell,
Nor strive to wind ourselves too high
For sinful man beneath the sky:

The trivial round, the common task,
Would furnish all we ought to ask,—
Room to deny ourselves; a road
To bring us daily nearer God.

Seek we no more; content with these,
Let present Rapture, Comfort, Ease,
As Heaven shall bid them, come and go:—
The secret this of Rest below." . . .

And then, my friends, one word more. "NOW is the accepted time" for being kind and helpful to one another: not after death has broken our fellowship. A friend of mine in the Old Country (a School Principal) once told me that an acquaintance of his, who was subject to great fits of depression, called upon him one evening to "visit" with him. My friend happened to be unusually busy that evening with some school reports, and he dismissed his acquaintance rather more abruptly than was his wont. Next morning he heard, to his utter dismay and confusion, that the fellow had made away with himself shortly after leaving his rooms. It was too late, then, to have the "visit" which might have steadied and cheered the man of moods.

And I remember how one of our theological professors used to tell us that at one time, when he had been a Sun-

day School teacher, one of his pupils was absent for several Sundays in succession. Time and again it occurred to him that he ought to call and ask for the boy: but he didn't do it,—until, one day, he heard that the boy was dead. I think I hear that able man yet telling us, in his usual calm and deliberate and pointed way, how cut and how utterly humiliated he was by that happening. He had waited too long. He had lost a great opportunity. He had omitted to DO IT NOW.

O, my friends, let us not wait till people are in their graves—to speak kindly of them and to wish them well. Better than flowers on their caskets when they have passed on into the night will be words of encouragement and good cheer while they are yet bearing the burden and heat of the day. Better—far better—than a host of friends to accompany their corpses to the cemetery will be a host of friends to support them and to give them heart and hope along the highway of life.

“NOW is the accepted time; . . . NOW is the day of salvation.” Yes, surely there is never a day—never an hour—when it is *not* precisely and expressly *the* very time to be kind and encouraging and cheering and helpful. “I shall pass through this world but once. Any good therefore that I can do, or any kindness that I can show to any human being, let me do it now. Let me not defer or neglect it, for I shall not pass this way again.”

“If you have gracious words to say,
Oh, give them to our hearts today.”

IV

THE ONE MASTER

"One is your master, even Christ."—MATTHEW XXIII,
10.

THE pith and point of our Lord's well-known saying that "no man can serve two masters" come from the fact that every man must serve one master. For, if it be true that man is born to rule,—born with the power of initiative, and with the faculty of taking command, and with the ability to achieve and to excel; it is also true that man is born to serve,—that, in order to the largest and richest kind of life, he needs to come under the spell and power of some higher command, or of some pursuit or personality. Indeed it has been said that no man is fit to command who has not first learned to obey, that no man is fit to rule who has not first learned to serve. "He that loseth his life . . . shall find it." He that loses himself—gives himself unreservedly—to the highest ideals and the purest purposes 'finds himself,' realizes himself, comes to his own.

And so the Christ says, further, with great plainness, "One is your Master—even CHRIST." So that, if you can say, "My heart's right *there*; my life is centered there; my affections and plans are all focussed there—in Christ:" if you can say these things, your life is no longer a conglomeration of unrelated fragments, but a unity.

And then, as the Apostle says, 'whether you eat, or drink, or whatsoever you do, you will do all to the glory of

God' Or, as he puts it elsewhere, "Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to . . . the Father by Him."

Now we are just about thoroughly convinced, these days, that the World is a Unity. By the harsh and unhinging circumstances of the past few months we have learned that "whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it."

Even so, it is part of our modern philosophy of life—and a wholesome part of it—that *Life* is a Unity; that a compartmental view of life is misleading, and, in fact, wrong and irreligious. Life, in the whole length and breadth and depth and height of it, belongs to God. And so, once we have made up our minds which are the "best gifts" to be 'coveted earnestly,' we must "ask the way" to the fulfilment of our ambitions "with our faces thitherward," and make every task and every experience and every circumstance bend to that search of the soul. To try to live a double life spells failure: for "no man can serve two masters." We must concentrate: "Unite my heart."—"This one thing I do"

Nor is this philosophy of life—this way of taking life—to be reckoned vague at all. It is all focussed and centred in CHRIST. It is made plain to us, and made contagious and potent to us, in a living Personality. "For one is your master, even Christ."

Yes I say, mark you, in a living Personality. For, hold what view you like of the Resurrection of Jesus and take what view you like of human immortality, there is nothing surer than that the Christ lives today—in all the implica-

tions and inspirations of His teaching, and in the myriad pleadings of His Spirit, and in the various indisputable conquests of His love—(there is nothing surer than that the Christ lives today) in this world of men and women: if not as vividly, yet as vivifyingly, as nineteen centuries ago in Palestine. Why, brethren, unless the New Testament is just a collection of pure gibberish, it is clear that no one (not even any of the twelve) companioned with the Christ more intimately and more magnetically than did the Apostle Paul; albeit he had never seen the Christ with the eye of his flesh—except perhaps in some mysterious fashion on the day of his conversion, and for but the flash of a moment. Even so today, there are hundreds of men and women who are companioning spiritually with the Christ every day of their lives, and who have brought their every thought and their every ambition and their every day's work into captivity to the obedience of Christ. 'One is their Master, even Christ:' and their lives are—each one—a unity, not divided up into compartments from some of which the companioning Christ is excluded and into some of which only He is admitted.

The truth is, brethren, this is just what *Religion* means, in the first instance. The man who "gets religion" (I don't particularly like that phrase; but I use it because you know what it usually indicates)—the man who gets religion has grasped the truth of the Oneness of Life, the Unity of Life,—that it is all under the Higher Command,—that we cannot live fragmentarily and compartmentally, but must serve the One Master all the time and in all the tasks we put our hands to and in all the experiences

we pass through.

Dr. Johnson (of Dictionary fame) used to say that "the world is full of unfortunates who have but one ailment—indecision." Well, Religion is just, in the first instance, decision: making up one's mind to go in the right direction all the time. And then, as Browning says,

"Who keeps one end in view makes all things serve."

For instance, under the sole Mastery of CHRIST we shall cease to make distinctions between the great and the small. For,

"All service ranks the same with God:

. . . there is no last nor first.

Say not 'a small event!' Why 'small?'"

Or, as the Master Himself put it, "Whosoever shall give to . . . one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward." O yes, just a passing call, or a brief letter, or some apparently trivial household duty done well and done cheerfully, may be "a sacrifice acceptable, well-pleasing to God." "Trifles make perfection," said Michael Angelo, when twitted with spending too much time on the details of his sculpturing, "(Trifles make perfection) but perfection is no trifle." And, in nine cases out of ten, the difference between first-rate work of any kind and what is not first-rate is that in the former the details have got the best possible attention, in the latter they have not. Be sure of this, my friends: that there is nothing (I mean, nothing decently and honorably human)—there is nothing which may not be done 'for Christ's sake,' nothing which may not be "touched to immortality."

And then, under the sole Mastery of CHRIST we shall cease to distinguish too sharply between sacred and secular. No one can read the life of Christ without being convinced that He regarded everything (except, of course, what was positively wrong) as sacred: motherhood and childhood, and human industry and happy human intercourse, and the clouds and the winds and the flowers, and God's winged songsters and God's fresh air. Who are we, then, that we should say only such-and-such appointed religious exercises or only such-and-such specially consecrated places are sacred,—all others secular? Or, who are we, that we should say, 'Business is business, and religion has nothing to do with it;' or, 'Religion is religion, and "The Lord will provide" whether we apply business methods to Church affairs or not?' Why, brethren, that compartmental view of life is one of the most mischievous things imaginable, and cuts at the very sinews of genuine godliness. . . . Of course there is such a thing as incongruity. No man with a sense of the fitness of things would think of discussing a business deal during the time of a prayer in the Sanctuary. That would be highly incongruous. But on the other hand, a man may serve God as effectively through a series of honorable business deals as by scrupulously regular attendance at Church ordinances. It is Charles Lamb who writes, in one of his famous essays, "I own that I am disposed to say grace upon twenty other occasions in the course of the day besides my dinner. I want a form (of grace) for setting out upon a pleasant walk, for a moonlight ramble, for a friendly meeting, or a solved problem. Why have we none for books, those spiritual repasts—a grace before Milton—a grace

before Shakespeare . . . ?" . . . and so on in the same strain. Wholesome teaching, in good sooth. For, those who have the CHRIST for their Master in every region of life—those who are minded to “do all to the glory of God”—will see a sanctity

“in the stars above,

“The clods below, the flesh without, the mind

“Within, the bread, the tear, the smile.”

And they will find it difficult to allow any questionable custom in their businesses, or any questionable pleasures in their lives.

And so I would say, further, that the undisputed and accepted Mastery of the CHRIST will enable us to see things in their proper proportion, and to have them rightly correlated in our lives.

Worship and Work, for instance. How often we “halt between two opinions”—and get nothing substantial done—because we do not apprehend the Unity of the Christ-touched life! We are not sure, on the one hand, just how much thought and time we should give to spiritual self-culture; and, on the other hand, just how much thought and time we should give to what is called nowadays social service. Well, the thing is solved in the life of Jesus. He certainly did not neglect Prayer: time and again we read of His retiring to ‘refresh His spirit’ and get nearer God in prayer. But we read also of His ‘going about doing good’—of His ‘going about all the cities and villages, teaching and preaching . . . and healing . . .’ And these, the prayer life and the practical life

were not two things with Him,—apart and unrelated: they were one,—the one God-filled and God-revealing and God-ward Life. Even so, my friends, when, under the spell of the Mastery of Christ, we ‘see life steadily, and see it whole,’ we should have no difficulty in preserving the balance between worship and work, between aspiration and activity, between the pursuit of personal sanctity and the ambition to be useful. The thing is to get up high enough, like Jesus Himself,—where we can see the one-ness of these two aspects of the Christian life. Then we shall escape many a perplexity and solve many a problem, just as (to borrow an illustration of Phillips Brooks’s) “the eagle flying through the sky is not worried how to cross the rivers.”

And so, too, my friends, we shall see—from that lofty atmosphere—from the view point of the Christ—(we shall see) that what we are inclined to call obstructions and hindrances and annoyances are often not so, but are part of the plan—may be, indeed, “direct means” of both personal spiritual culture and sacrificial-service-of-our-brethren-of-mankind. It was somewhat against the grain, with Jesus and His disciples, that they “must needs go through Samaria” (‘for the Jews had no dealings with the Samaritans’) on their way North from Judea to Galilee. Yes, but that journey “through Samaria” was a memorable one: it gave us some of the most beautiful and far-reaching sayings of Jesus, and a whole community was converted. Just let me quote to you the sentence I quoted to you the other Sunday evening and which I have typewritten and hung up in my Study, “What you call hindrances, obstacles, disappointments are probably GOD’S

OPPORTUNITIES." . . . I do not forget, to be sure, that "much of the best piety of the world is ripened, not under sorrow, but under joy." Yes, there are, as the Book of Ecclesiastes says, both "a time to weep, and a time to laugh." But that is just what I want to be at: that both sorrow and joy—both joy and sorrow—go to make up the Unity of the ideal life; that we may pass through them both "to the glory of God;" that we should neither suspect our joys nor strangle our sorrows, but let both 'have their perfect work' with us. . . .

Now, brethren, there is scarcely any truth—be it ever so wholesome and ever so sublime—which has not been exaggerated and distorted. And so it has been with the truth I am trying to impress upon you today.

Life should be a Unity. Yes. And so, it has been said, we may see God in the stars as clearly as in the saints; and we may worship God in the fields and on the hill-slopes and by our hearth-stones, as sincerely and successfully as we can in any appointed Sanctuary 'with a multitude that keep holy day;' and we may be just as sincere Christians at a game of pool as in a Mission Study Class; and so on. Indeed, it has been put—rather extremely—in this way,—that God is in a crust as surely as He is in the Christ.

But, my friends, we are not going to lose our sense of perspective, are we? St. Paul says, you remember, "Covet earnestly the best gifts." He speaks, too, of the "things that are more excellent." And we ourselves imply, by a phrase we often use, that some things are more "worth while" than others. "Seek ye first," said the Master Him-

self, ("first," not in point of time, but in point of importance)—"seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

The great thing is, then, to put **FIRST THINGS FIRST**, and second and third things in their respective places. . . . And this is all the more important, when the second and third things are not forbidden by the Spirit of Christ.

Take, for instance, the question of how to spend our leisure hours—of how much time to give to our amusements. Surely, under the sole Mastery of Christ, our reasonable recreations and our wholesome amusements have their place, and are entitled to a certain portion of our time. Yes; but *what* place, and *how much* of our time? These are the questions: let us be loyal to **CHRIST**, when we go about to answer them.

"To dress, to call, to dine, to break
 No canon of the social code,
 The little laws that lacqueys make,
 The futile decalogue of Mode,—
 How many a soul for these things lives,
 With pious passion, grave intent!
 While Nature careless-handed gives
 The things that are more excellent.

The grace of friendship—mind and heart
 Linked with their fellow heart and mind;
 The gains of science, gifts of art;
 The sense of oneness with our kind;
 The thirst to know and understand—

A large and liberal discontent:
These are the goods in life's rich hand,
The things that are more excellent."

O my friends, there are big things to be done these days—there is a wonderfully rich and useful life to be lived these days,—especially by those of us who profess to hold-to the New Testament view of life and who do ourselves the distinction of saying that 'One is *our* Master, even CHRIST.' Are we rising to the occasion? Or, are we missing our glorious and Christ-sent opportunities, and remaining on the dull levels of mediocrity? Are we, as we grow older, 'surrendering the ideals of our lives,' and becoming more cynical and more supine? Or, are we holding-to our best ideals, and seeing more clearly every day that they can only be realized "in CHRIST"—by our accepting more fully His Spirit and by our giving ourselves more heartily to His Service of Love and Usefulness? Let us make the Venture of Faith.

V

SACRIFICES OF JOY

"Therefore will I offer . . . sacrifices of joy."—PSALM
XXVII, 6.

THIS fine Psalm, from which our text is taken, is what might be called a double-header. It is in two parts—of rather different hue. The first part (verses 1 to 6) rings with confidence and gladness—born of the conviction of God's care and help. Then suddenly—at verse 7—the tone changes: "false witnesses" and "such as breathe out cruelty" come into the Psalmist's mind, and anxious prayer takes the place of the buoyancy of the earlier portion of the poem—prayer born of misgiving and dismay. Then—at the close—another touch of trust.

Our text, then, is from the first portion of the Psalm,—the jubilant portion: "Therefore will I offer in His tabernacle sacrifices of joy." . . .

"Sacrifices of Joy!" That is to say, Sacrifices (after the manner of the old Hebrew ritual)—sacrifices of produce or of animal flesh indicative of gratitude and gladness, and perhaps to some happy accompaniment—such as songs of praise or the blowing of trumpets.

It is easy to see what was meant, in the first instance.

But, my friends, I cannot help seeing in this little phrase a larger content than I have just indicated, a deeper suggestiveness.

"Sacrifices of Joy"! On the first blush of it, isn't the phrase rather striking? Taking it out of its immediate

setting here, looking at it in its naked simplicity—without reference to the Hebrew ritual, and using it as modern speech, are we not somewhat surprised at the originality of the phrase (as a matter of fact, it occurs only here in all Scripture): “Sacrifices of Joy”? A sort of contradiction in terms, is it not? ‘Sacrifice’ and ‘Joy:’ what have they in common? Isn’t Joy “an easy, natural, spontaneous, irrepressible thing”? And isn’t Sacrifice, on the other hand, a hard and strenuous thing,—a thing that goes against the grain, a thing with not “joy”—but pain and sorrow—at the heart of it? How shall you and I—today, and without ritual, and in the ordinary course of our experience—(how shall you and I) “offer sacrifices of joy?” Is it even necessary for us to think about it? Has the thing any meaning for us?

Yes, my friends, I think so; and I wish to try to tell you, this morning, how the element of Sacrifice lies at the heart of all Joy that is pure and permanent and worthy of the name, how it may cost us something to bring to God offerings of Joy,—if it also costs to bring to Him offerings of labor and tears. . . . And it is a thing we need to know: because almost every soul of man is seeking Joy—seeking Happiness, but the thing they so name and so seek is eluding the vast majority of people. Why? Because, for one thing, so many men and women do not know how to make the “*sacrifices* of Joy.”

In what respects, then, is Joy a Sacrifice, a renouncement, a losing of oneself?

But, mark you, I am not thinking so much of our ephemeral joys—the passing gladnesses of every day, as of those heart-joys which have the element of permanency in them.

Our ephemeral gaiety and gladness may be perfectly chaste and wholesome,—good to look upon and the best of tonics. But the real *Joy* of life—the happiness of the soul—is something deeper and more abiding: something worth paying for, as well as praying for. Yes, it has “Sacrifice” at the heart of it; just as the most sweet and luscious fruits have bitter seeds at the heart of them,—the bitter seed, by the way, being the source and beginning of the whole thing.

Let me remind you, then, first of all, that Joy is not to be had for the asking. It will not come at our mere bidding. It is continually eluding our search, and defying our capture. In fact nine times out of ten the surest way to miss happiness is to hunt for it.

To be sure we may encourage Joy to come our way. We can do a good deal in the way of making the conditions favorable. But we simply cannot command the thing itself. It must “take place.” You may open your shutters and pull up your shades, and have your windows faultlessly clean, and have your various rooms appropriately painted and papered so as to get the light to the best advantage: but you cannot make the sun rise nor manufacture the day-light. You have to wait for these things. Even so, the preliminary condition of all true Joy is to know how to wait for it. And, if I mistake not, there is an element of sacrifice in the waiting process: especially when you have to wait long, and when you see no signs of the coming of your desire.

Has it ever occurred to you how seldom Jesus used the words Joy and Happiness: unless we except his pretty

frequent use of the word "blessed," which means something more than just 'happy'? And yet you feel—do you not?—that Happiness is an implicate of all His teaching. Not expressly, but potentially, it is promised in His every parable and in His every appeal; and the gift of Joy is at the heart of His whole message. Only, it is not a thing to be sought exclusively, nor as a chief end. "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." Yes, Joy is a thing that is "added:" a thing that "takes place:" a thing that joins you on the road, when you are about your business and have almost forgotten that you were seeking for happiness.

Yes, joins you on the road—of DUTY. And so I would remind you, further, that Joy *costs*. If, in a sense, it is not to be had for the seeking; in another sense it is to be had for the striving.

It has been said by a Swiss writer that the rule of the road for life is "a great duty and some serious affections:" and another Swiss writer—a woman this time—has put it so, "God has ordained that happiness, like every other good thing, should cost us something: He has willed that it should be a moral achievement, not an accident."

Ah, we often smile when we hear the old adage, "Be good, and you'll be happy." But there is true philosophy there. It is sound teaching. For does it not just mean that the secret of true happiness is not to be charmed out of Somewhere in some wizard fashion, but is to be found when we have almost forgotten to think about it—in our appointed paths of service?

True, there are giddy gaieties and hollow hilarities to be experienced in some of the questionable by-paths of life. But (take my word for it, my young friends) there is only one place where abiding Joy is to be found. And that is, where Christ Himself found it: by being true to the best that we know, and following the Higher Command.

I have already spoken of our Saviour's sparing use of the word Joy—or its like. Well, it is a remarkable fact that He used that word most near the end: as, for instance, when He said to the disciples on the very eve of His crucifixion, "These things have I spoken unto you, that My joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full." Yes, He used that word much near the end. Which means—does it not?—that the more surely He felt Himself, as time went on, in line with God's will, and the more it was costing Him to keep to the path of Duty (however thorny), the more confidently He could speak of His "Joy" and the more unhesitatingly He could promise Joy to others. Ay, and let me tell you that the happiest men and women on God's earth today are those who are 'laying down their own necks' in sacrificial service for the causes that are most worth while, who are saying in their hearts—with the Christian Apostle of old—"Neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." O yes, some people who have traveled a little in the East and made a nodding acquaintance with conditions there come home and tell us, with an air of omniscience and a spirit of sarcasm, that our

missionaries to the heathen are a happy crowd and are apparently having a good time. Of course they are a happy crowd. Why? Because they believe, and are living in the conviction, that Happiness spells these two ways: D-U-T-Y. and S-E-R-V-I-C-E

That is the great truth back of the well-known lines of Wordsworth—in his 'Ode To Duty,'—

“Stern Lawgiver! yet thou dost wear
The Godhead's most benignant grace;
Nor know we anything so fair
As is the smile upon thy face:
Flowers laugh before thee on their beds,
And fragrance in thy footing treads.”

And so I must say, further, that, if some people are ever to know what Joy is, they will need a thorough overhauling of their lives.

“*Sacrifices of Joy!*” Yes, indeed! Some things some individuals must ‘sacrifice’—some things they must cut out—if they are to be really glad, if they are to be unaffectedly happy, if “the joy of the Lord” is to be theirs. This or that tarnishing and gloom-producing habit, it may be. Or, their sourness. Or, their proneness to nurse their grudges. Or, their sinuous and insinuating interest in other folks’ affairs. Or, their laziness. Or, their feverish worldliness. And so forth, and so on. Joy cannot live with these things—and such as these. Joy says to us, when we ask it why it does not tarry with us, “Feed me with food convenient for me: congenial company, too, I must have, if I am to make my home in your hearts.”

O, my friends, is it any wonder that some people are unhappy—awfully unhappy? For the worst kind of unhappiness—the most bitter and most benumbing kind of misery—is the kind a man brings upon himself “Sorrow is hard to bear.” Yes, bereavement, and the estrangement of friends, and the untowardness of circumstances, and sickness, and the various “slings and arrows of outrageous fortune” (if we choose, with Shakespeare, to phrase it that way) are all “hard to bear.” But they are only a drop in the bucket compared with the abject misery of the man who is putting Joy farther and farther away from him every day by allowing his better self to be gradually crushed out of him by SIN; and who has still the sense to see the ghastly truth of it all, and the conscience to feel the shame of it,—but . . . he will not bring himself to make the “*sacrifices* of joy.”

And then, brethren, is it not the case that sometimes—for the sake of the other fellow—you assume an aspect of gladness, when you are by no means glad yourself—when your heart is sore? I came across a Calendar maxim the other day on this wise, “Look pleasant, even if you do not feel so.” Rather a difficult proposition! Yes, one of the “*sacrifices* of joy.” And, blessed are the souls who can bring themselves to make that ‘sacrifice!’ I know some of them. Their lives spoiled, and overburdened with cares that they ought to have been spared: their hearts hungering for sympathy and love, and still hungering in vain: their dearest and worthiest ambitions shattered long ago, and never likely to be renewed again on this side of time. And yet—whatever

they may feel in the secret places of their own souls and whatever they may be in their lonely hours—they are always kind and cheerful amid their human fellowships, and are always speaking the best of people—even of those who have ministered to their want and woe, and have always a word of heartening for the discouraged of their acquaintance. How do they do it? Well, I suppose it is the old explanation:—that they are “in Christ,” that His Joy abides in them, that they are ‘abounding in Hope through the power of the Holy Spirit.’

And then, brethren, doesn’t the New Testament exhort us to “rejoice with them that do rejoice” as well as “weep with them that weep”—to companion people heartily in their joys as well as comfort them healingly in their sorrows?

And *that* calls for ‘sacrifice’—does it not? To be glad of the children’s gladness; to be interested in the projects of the youth about you, and appreciative of their ambitions; to be really glad of your friend’s prosperity in business, or in his family; to have no shadow of a grudge that your neighbor has had some stroke of good fortune which has not come your way,—albeit you may have deserved it not less. All that may seem less necessary, less distinctively Christian,—it may seem to involve less self-renunciation than sympathizing with men in their sorrows and reaching out the helping hand. Yet in some ways ‘rejoicing with them that do rejoice’ is a nobler thing—a greater spiritual achievement—than ‘weeping with them that weep.’ It implies a higher reach of unselfishness.

For it means that you have overcome envy and jealousy and all that hideous and greedy brood. It means that you have become emancipated from yourself, and are on the sure way to possessing the Mind of Christ.

And then, my friends, have we not been told scores of times and in scores of ways and by scores of people, and do we not know, that Making Others Happy is the best happiness? Well, doesn't that cost something? Doesn't it call for self-repression and self-sacrifice—in little things and in great? Do you mean to tell me, for instance, that in wedded life (even the most ideally harmonious and happy wedded life) there are no self-renunciations on this side and on that? Why! it is precisely because some couples have come together with no thought of making sacrifices in one another's favor that their married lives are unhappy, and perhaps in course of time broken. Similarly, if the relations between parents and children—or between a pastor and his people—or between an employer of labor and his employés—if relations such as these are to be harmonious and happy and helpful, there must be self-sacrifice, give as well as take, on both sides—the "Sacrifices of Joy."

Who is HE whom we are entitled to call the world's supreme Joy-Bringer? Who is HE who has done most to make others happy? Is it not our Lord Jesus Christ, of whose appearance the heavenly voice above the plains of Bethlehem sang, "Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people?" We know something of what He has done to cheer and gladden Humanity—to "give . . . beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of

heaviness." For, first of all and best of all, He has gone to the root of all unhappiness and has touched Sin with His holy touch of destruction, and made us free (if we will). Yes, but at what a cost! At what a 'sacrifice' has our "Joy" been made sure to us! Truly, on the Cross He was offering the "sacrifices of joy."

"Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,

Or thorns compose so rich a crown?"

And, my friends, just because our Joy has been made sure to us in *that* way—through Love going to the limit of self-sacrifice,—it is no shallow and evanescent happiness, ready to take wings and fly away; but deep and abiding. As the Christ Himself said, "Your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." . . .

Brethren, am I talking to any man or woman this morning—younger or older—who has never been really happy, who does not know what JOY is—the indescribable and indestructible joy of the soul? If so, here is a question for you,—Have you made the needed 'sacrifice'? If not, need you wonder at the joylessness of your life!

"I will offer . . . the sacrifices of joy:" *then—*

"I will sing, yea, I will sing praises unto the Lord."

VI

ARE WE ALL SINNERS?

"If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves."—
I JOHN i, 8.

WE are accustomed to think of the season of Lent as being a suitable time for self-examination, a suitable time for taking—so to speak—a moral and spiritual inventory of ourselves. Where do we stand with God? How far have we gone in our emancipation from evil? Where are we in the way of moral and spiritual progress?

We know, indeed, that self-examination may be overdone; may become a habit of morbid introspection,—not wholesome but harmful. "To watch one's soul all the time, seeking for moral disease, is as bad as to watch one's body all the time, seeking for physical disease." And, after all, the uplook and the outlook are better than the inlook.

But surely there is a wise and wholesome and helpful type of self-examination. And surely also it is greatly needed by us in these days of haste and of "the world" being so much "with us." You recollect how the Book here says, "Let a man examine himself." And, when we ask God—in the familiar language of the Psalm—to "search us and know our hearts" and to "try us and know our thoughts," we are, to all intents and purposes, asking for grace to search ourselves and know our own hearts and to try ourselves and know our own thoughts.

Well then, if, in making our moral and spiritual in-

ventory, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us."

"We deceive *ourselves!*" To deceive the other fellow is bad enough: to deceive oneself is worse in many ways. To deceive the other fellow is treachery: to deceive oneself is tragedy. For it is the end of all sincerity: it is the end of all progress along the higher lines.

And, verily, we *do* "deceive ourselves"—"if we say that we have no sin" (that is, if we "say" it in our hearts—if we try to persuade ourselves that it *is so*). For, as Phillips Brooks has said, "When a man sees himself, he always sees sin."

Now, it has frequently been said (not so frequently these days, perhaps, as it used to be: but we are not in all respects wiser than our predecessors)—it has frequently been said that we shall never really understand our need of CHRIST, and that we shall never really appreciate the wonder and the worth of His redeeming work, until we have a proper sense of Sin. As the well-known hymn has it,

"Convince us of our sin,
Then lead to Jesus' blood,
And to our wondering view reveal
The secret love of God."

Well, it seems to me that a proper sense of Sin is largely lacking, these days, in many quarters,—a proper sense of the horror of it, and the subtlety of it, and the pervasiveness of it, and of its presence—in greater or less degree—in these human lives of ours without exception. To a large extent the men and women of today

dislike the word "sin," and have dropped it from their vocabulary; and they are finding longer and more innocuous words for it. A fellow does not "sin" now-a-days: he makes a moral aberration. A fellow is not a "sinner" now-a-days: he is a paranoiac, or something of that sort.

But, brethren, there is no other word in the language that can take the place of the little word "Sin." There is no other word that can compare with it for incisiveness, and for comprehensiveness, and for solemnity of religious significance.

And let me tell you that this little word—or one or other of its immediate derivatives—(not to speak of words like 'iniquity' and 'wickedness' and 'trespass' and 'transgression' and 'unrighteousness')—this little word occurs something like 700 times in these Scriptures,—over 200 times in the New Testament alone.

What then? "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves."

For, brethren, there has only been ONE, of Whom it could be said that He "knew no sin" and "did no sin," and Who could say—for Himself—"Which of you convicteth me of sin?"

"But Thee, but Thee, O sovereign Seer of time,
But Thee, O poets' Poet, Wisdom's tongue,
But Thee, O man's best Man, O love's best Love,
O perfect life in perfect labor writ,
O all men's Comrade, Servant, King, or Priest,—
What *if* or *yet*, what mole, what flaw, what lapse,
What least defect or shadow of defect,
What rumor, tattled by an enemy,
Of inference loose, what lack of grace

Even in torture's grasp, or sleep's, or death's—
Oh, what amiss may I forgive in Thee,
Jesus, good Paragon, thou Crystal Christ?"
Yes, "if we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves,"
and we put ourselves—forsooth—on that sublime level.

The majority of us, to be sure, cannot say, with any show of fairness whatever, that "we have no sin." We are all too conscious that we "have" a considerable amount of it; and perhaps we are willing to say so quite frankly. Anyhow, before GOD we are abashed and humbled. And, when it comes to a question of our deserts, we are about minded to say, with Robert Louis Stevenson, "One need not complain of a pebble in the shoe, when by mere justice one should rot in a dungeon."

The fact remains, however, that there are quite a few people who thoroughly dislike the words "sin" and "sinner;" who object to apply these words to themselves, and object to have other people applying these words to them. Either they profess not to understand all this talk about Sin: or else, with a certain amount of understanding of it, they resent it—and that rather petulantly. Perhaps they would not call themselves saints; but they are not going to call themselves sinners. They refuse to say, with Jacob of old, "O God . . . I am not worthy of all the mercies, and of all the truth, which Thou hast shewed unto thy servant:" because (they might hint) they have not been so crafty as Jacob was. They refuse to 'stand afar off,' like the publican of the Gospels, and to smite upon their breasts, saying, "God be merciful to me a sinner:" because (they might hint) they

have not been grafters, as the "publicans" of Palestine were reputed to be for the most part. They object to sing, with Charles Wesley, "I am all unrighteousness; False and full of sin I am:" because (they might say) that is simply not true. They are living (they would say) decent, honest, clean, industrious lives; and they are harming no one. What more could be wanted? To all intents and purposes they are 'saying that they have *no sin.*'

Well, brethren, perhaps it is not necessary that we should all use—every day, or even every Sunday—the precise words of the patriarch Jacob which I have just quoted; or the precise words and the precise posture of the publican of Jesus' parable; or the precise words of that particular hymn of Charles Wesley.

Nevertheless, "if"—no matter who we are, or what we are—"if" we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." Before GOD, and by comparison with the "Crystal Christ," we have *all* "sinned, and come short of the glory of God."

"If we say that we have no sin, we *deceive* ourselves." Ay, *there* is the very first symptom of Sin in the man who refuses to own himself a sinner. Sin has "deceived" him. For that is a way Sin has. It deceives us. It distorts our vision. It spoils our perspective. It takes the edge off our finer sensibilities. So that we are prone to think we are what we are not. Yes, in many cases those who say, with a dash of petulant pride, 'Why, what evil have we done?' are just about the greatest sinners of all—if they only knew it: "having the understanding darkened,

being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart." You remember how Job finished up his colloquy with the Almighty—spite of the fact that he reckoned himself an innocent man according to the usual standard and counted his extreme sufferings undeserved,—you remember how he said at the end, "I have heard of Thee by the hearing of the ear: but now mine eye seeth Thee. Wherefore I abhor myself, and repent in dust and ashes." O yes, the truly godly men of the centuries have never said—any one of them—that they had "no sin." Indeed it is a remarkable fact that the more godly and the more saintly they have become, the more pathetic and the more sincere has their confession of sin become: because, I suppose, their ideals have always been rising with their achievements, and they have been realizing more fully every day what the Perfect Purity and the Perfect Love must mean. . . .

Then, my friends, will you consider such things as these?—

According to the New Testament standard, if I am not very far mistaken (and if I am mistaken, I am in amazing good company),—according to the New Testament standard it is not enough that we refrain from doing evil; we are to get some positive good done. "Goodness is energy. It is not the absence of faults (merely), it is the presence of moral dynamic." Which of us can say, then, that his "moral dynamic" is as live and active as it might be? "If we know the love of God," some one has said, "(if we know the love of God), we cannot

look back upon even a wasted hour without sorrow." O yes, so long as we are not doing our positive best, we are yet at least half—"dead in trespasses and sins." And you know that one of our Saviour's most awful words of condemnation was just this,—“Inasmuch as ye did it *not*.” It is pathetic—it is tragic—to see some people taking such good care of themselves, both physically and morally, but not doing a hand's turn to make themselves useful in this world. They are scrupulously careful—O yes: they are very correct—O yes: they never do anything wrong—O no! But they never *do* anything right: and I am inclined to agree with George Macdonald when he says that “no indulgence of passion destroys the spiritual nature so much as respectable selfishness.” “Respectable selfishness!” How horrible! How utterly unChristlike!

Again, what about the spiritual Sins?—Pride, Contemptuousness, Insensate Anger, “Envy, Hatred, and Malice, and all Uncharitableness.” Can any human say that he is entirely free from all these things—and such as these? Some people are apt to think that, because they are free from the sins of the flesh and the grosser forms of evil, they “have no sin.” Brethren, there could not be a greater mistake. Have you ever read—discerningly—St. Paul's catalogue of what he calls “the works of the flesh,” the things which disqualify a man from citizenship in the Kingdom? Well, the catalogue begins with “adultery,” and finishes with “revellings, and such like;” but, mark you, it includes such things as these—“lasciviousness” (that is, looseness or lustfulness of *thought*), —lasciviousness, . . . hatred, . . . wrath, strife,

. . . envyings," and others of *that* order. . . . Of a truth we have need to 'search ourselves and know our hearts' and to 'try ourselves and know our thoughts'—ere we presume to "say that we have no sin."

Again, what about the *little* Sins,—which we are scarcely minded to call "sins" at all? That is too severe, and as it were too august, a name for them. . . . Is it? You know, our African explorers have told us that they have not been nearly so much afraid of the lions as of the little tsetse fly, whose bite means fever for a certainty, and not uncommonly death. And you don't need to smash the glasses of a telescope, or give them a thick coating of paint, in order to prevent you seeing through them. Just breathe on them, and the stars are shut out. Even so, the little sins may do great damage: the little discourtesies, the little complainings, the little naggings, the little neglects, the little unfaithfulnesses, and so forth. Is any of us perfect, then, just here? "Keep us," writes Christian Rossetti in one of her prayers, "(keep us) from dividing Thy commandments into great and small, according to our own blind estimate."

Again, there is an interesting test proposed, you recollect, in the Epistle of James: "If any man offend not in *word*, the same is a perfect man." Is any of us perfect just there?—never 'offending in word': all our words, on all occasions (both in public and in private, both when we are speaking to people and when we are speaking about people)—all our words just as true and sweet and kind and encouraging, and what not, as they might be: all our words redolent of the Spirit of Christ? Why! every

one of us, I cannot but think, is 'sinning and coming short' in that respect every day. Yes, you remember what the prophet Isaiah exclaimed, (and Isaiah was a pretty good man, I guess) when once he got the true vision of the All-holy God: "Then said I, Woe is me! for I am undone; because I am a man of unclean lips . . . : for mine eyes have seen the King, the Lord of Hosts."

Again, I was talking, the other day, with one of our ministers who has made a study of the ethics of our American Economics; and he said this—he was talking about the methods of a certain type of evangelist—he said this), It's easy enough to lash away at the crass and blatant sins of this Country; but the worst sins of this Country—the sins, too, which are responsible for many of the others—are its economic sins. And so, my friends, a man who is living a thoroughly clean and upright and generous life (so far as his own personality is concerned) may all the while be tacitly consenting to an unjust and unjustifiable economic situation: in regard to the matter of work and wages, for instance. True, it may be "in ignorance" that he is so consenting. But, remember, although Paul says of his life of 'persecuting' and 'blaspheming' before he came to know Christ, that he "did it ignorantly in unbelief," he does not omit to call himself, in the same passage, the "chief" of "sinners." *There* is another thing to think about—for those who may be inclined to 'say that they have no sin.'

And then, brethren, finally and as the sum of all, what are we to think of ourselves when we measure ourselves

up with the Peerless CHRIST? On one occasion—it is told—Charles Lamb and some of his friends were talking in a sort of gay fashion, about how they would feel and act if some of the greatest of the dead were to appear suddenly among them in flesh and blood. ‘If Plato entered the room? or Shakespeare? or Milton?’—and so on. Then some one asked, ‘And if CHRIST entered this room?’ Whereupon Lamb suddenly changed his tone and stuttered out, as his manner was when moved, “You see, if Shakespeare entered we should all rise. If HE appeared, we must kneel.”

Enough said!

“If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

“Convince us of our sin,
Then lead to Jesus’ blood.”

VII

MANY THINGS: BUT NOT THE THING

"He did many things."—MARK VI, 20.

IF the author of the Second Gospel was not a literary artist born, he certainly became one when he reached this particular narrative—the account of John the Baptist's death. It is just about the most vivacious portion of Scripture you need wish to read. It throbs and flashes with live humanity. Extremes meet here, too: from the rectitude and courage of the Baptist to the maudlin weakness of Herod and the diabolical wickedness of Herodias. It is both lively and lurid. In almost every verse there is a knife-like thrust, cutting into the corruption of a time which greatly needed to be dissected with the Sword of the Spirit.

Herod was in a bad case. He had "married" (such was the looseness of the times)—he had "married" his brother's wife, without—so far as we know—any divorce process having been instituted. And he was doubly in the wrong; because his relationship with Herodias (apart from her being his brother's wife) was within the forbidden degrees.

But, whereas Herodias was unscrupulously wicked and would stick at nothing to get rid of John the Baptist, Herod was not beyond having qualms of conscience and a certain sense of honor. So that, on the one hand, he "heard" John "gladly;" while, on the other hand, "for his oath's sake" he would not go back upon his wild prom-

ise to Herodias' daughter—to give her 'whatsoever she should ask of him . . . to the half of his kingdom.'

And so one of the keenest and most illuminating flashes of the narrative before us is in the verse from which my text is taken: "For Herod feared John, knowing that he was a just man and an holy, and observed him; and when he heard him, he did many things, and heard him gladly."

Yes, "he did many things;" but not *the* thing. He amended his ways, perhaps, in this direction and in that; took some little new interest, perhaps, in holy things; and, in all probability, he made things as comfortable as possible for the prisoner-prophet. But he did not "screw" his "courage to the sticking-place" and put away his unlawful wife. And so long as he was living in that illicit union, he could not possibly rise above a certain miserable level. His soul was the Devil's prisoner. With Herodias renounced, he would presumably have been guiltless of the Baptist's blood, and a better man in twenty different ways.

"He did many things;" but not *the* thing!

If you turn to the Old Testament and read the account of the Kings of Judah, you will come across this sort of passage every now and again: "And he" (referring to one or other of the kings) "and he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father had done; *save that* the high places were not removed: the people sacrificed and burned incense still on the high places." In other words, Joash or Uzziah—or whoever the particular king might be—was in many respects a good fellow; *but* he permitted the people to

continue their idolatrous customs, and was therefore weak and unhelpful in that one direction.

Then you remember how Jesus said to the rich young ruler, who could boast of a remarkably clean record in respect of his personal morals, "Yet lackest thou one thing: sell all that thou hast, . . . and come, follow Me." "Yet lackest thou one thing." Just "one" thing! Yes, but it was a big thing—freedom from the entanglement of his wealth. It was *the* thing that would have enabled him to enter into fulness of life—according to Christ's view of life. He had 'done many things,' and was apparently a fine and lovable fellow: but *the* thing that would have made him an emancipated man, and a consecrated man, and a useful man, and a happy man, he had yet to do: and he broke down at the critical point.

"He did many things;" but not *the* thing.

Ah, how true to human nature! What a host of individuals there are who are 'doing many things'—good and estimable things, and doing them with a considerable amount of grace and goodwill and unselfish abandon; who are all the while failing to do the thing that would lift them out of moral mediocrity and make them "great in the kingdom of heaven!" How many men there are who are not fully realizing themselves, who are not coming to their best as swiftly and as surely as they might; because they are not concentrating on the 'one thing needful!' How many people there are who are not 'closing with Christ' (to use a familiar and suggestive evangelistic phrase), because some one thing in their life they have yet to make up their minds to renounce! O yes, in order to

please good people and to comply—at least respectably—with Christian principle and Christian custom, and (it may be) out of the natural amiability of our hearts, we will do all sorts of things, . . . *except* the one thing that is going to put us absolutely and unequivocally right with CHRIST.

And then, how some people fail you at the critical moment! How some people have the awkward knack of not being on deck just when you want them and are most trustingly relying upon them! They have ‘done many things,’ have done their part right enough here and there, have helped you out well at this point and at that,—to your cordial and thankful satisfaction. But, somehow or other, just when you most need them—just when you are most depending upon them, they are not there; and their usefulness has suddenly been discounted. (I am speaking, of course, of *preventible* hanging-back from service).

Then, of course, we all know how some folks’ usefulness is handicapped—sometimes hopelessly handicapped—by some twist of temper, or by some bitterness of tongue, or by some questionable habit. They are ‘just fine’ in this way and in that, and are ‘doing many things’ that are really worth while. But every now and again their conspicuous weakness or their besetting sin gets the better of them, and all but annihilates, so to speak, the whole structure of their good influence.

“’Tis true: . . . And pity ’t is ’t is true.”

But, my friends, I wish, this evening, not merely to criticize; but, rather, to counsel and to confirm: not

merely to hit; but, rather, to help.

And so I wish to say, once for all, that I am very well aware how *difficult* it may be to do *the* thing in addition to the "many things." Do not for a moment imagine that I under-rate the difficulty of the process, ay the almost impossibility of the process—apart from the grace of God. (I am not in the habit of dealing from this pulpit with things I know nothing about: I usually "speak that I do know".)

Of course it would have been immensely difficult for the well-disposed kings of Judah to put an end to the idolatry of their subjects throughout the length and breadth of the land. It would have been immensely difficult for the rich young ruler to 'sell all that he had' and adopt the simple and small-pursed and selfless fashion of life which Jesus and His disciples were leading. It would have been immensely difficult—presumably—for Herod to part with Herodias and ask his brother to take her back again to his home. . . . Indeed the chief reason why *the* thing is not done, in this instance and in that, why the fatal hindrance is not renounced, is just the unspeakable difficulty of the process. Sometimes, no doubt, under the constraint of CHRIST, it is wonderfully easy—even at a first attempt. But usually, and to the "natural man" certainly, it is difficult. Is it bitterness of speech that is your hindrance? You know how difficult it is to 'tame the tongue.' Is it pettishness of disposition that is your hindrance? You know how difficult it is to root that out. Is it some unworthy habitual gratification of the senses that is your hindrance? You know how difficult it is to get rid of that tyrannous kind of occu-

pancy.

But, my friends, once our spirits have been touched—even ever so lightly—to the finer issues of life, the very difficulty of the way should be a sort of allurements: for surely there is a spark of the heroic in every human heart. “It is a calumny on men,” says Carlyle, “(it is a calumny on men) to say that they are roused to heroic action by ease, hope of pleasure, recompense—sugar plums of any kind, in this world or the next! In the meanest mortal there lies something nobler. . . . It is not to taste sweet things, but to do noble and true things and vindicate himself under God’s heaven as a God-made man, that the poorest son of Adam dimly longs.” And so are we not really anxious in our heart of hearts to do *the* thing, when we know what it is and how to do it? We are told, you remember, that the rich young ruler “went away grieved” from his interview with Christ. And so I believe that, in most cases, the individual who cannot ‘screw his courage to the sticking-place’ and renounce his fatal hindrance is sorry for himself.

Anyhow, the first step is to know precisely what the fatal hindrance is. What is it that is keeping you from being what you might be? What is it that is preventing you realizing yourself—in the best sense (the Christian sense) of the phrase? What is it that comes between CHRIST and you?— And, my friends, even in the best men and women there is, every now and then, something setting itself up between Christ and them.

What is it, then? Be definite about it. Be precise about it. No use just saying, in a general way, “O, I

am not good enough: I am not worthy;" and so forth. *Why* am I not? In what precise respect am I not? "When you are examining yourself," says Ruskin, "never call yourself a 'sinner;' that is very cheap abuse and utterly useless. Call yourself a liar, a coward, a sluggard, a glutton, etc., if you indeed find yourself to be in any wise any of these." Yes, I believe that for every man in this world who is not frank with his fellow-mortals there are three men who are not frank with themselves. Some men and women, I tell you, have to take hold of themselves far more frankly and firmly and fearlessly than they have ever yet done.

And, mark you this: it may not be something which we ought to 'cut out' that is keeping us from the Best; it may be something which we ought to *thrust in* to our experience. Your hindrance may just be that you are not taking hold here and there as you ought. Indeed, I often think that, in the work of the Kingdom in particular, the greatest hinderers are not those outside who scorn and thwart, but those inside who are 'shirkers' and 'quitters.' You know, perhaps the most solemn word of condemnation which our Saviour ever uttered was "Inasmuch as ye did it *not*."

But now some one says, there is no use exhorting me to be frank with myself: there is no call for a peculiarly keen self-analysis on my part: I know well enough what my fatal hindrance is. . . . Very well, then: the next point is, *Concentrate*. The first point is, Be precise: the next is, Concentrate on *the* thing.

This is an age of specialization and concentration. In

connection with this process and with that, in connection with this campaign and with that, we insist on finding out the strategic points, and concentrating there. . .

. We need the same sort of thing in the moral and spiritual sphere. "If thy right hand offend thee, cut it off." No use scratching and experimenting over the whole body: it is the "right hand" that must go. No use 'doing many things' in a more or less purposeless and harmlessly amiable fashion: it is *the* thing that we must tackle. At all costs, this or that must go. At all costs, this or that must *be done*. "If ye know these things," says Christ, "happy are ye if ye do them." Yes, and everlastingly unhappy if we don't!

"He did many things;" but not *the* thing!

Sometimes, friends, *the* thing to be 'done' is a very big thing: amounting, in fact, to a complete change of heart and mind (what the New Testament calls Conversion), a complete change of one's view of life and of one's attitude towards human-kind, a complete re-direction of one's life. To use our Lord's own forceful figure, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." As the author of "The Inside of The Cup" points out very pithily, that may sometimes require to be said to the Church as a whole: because an entire Institution may require rebirth. Anyhow it is most always requiring to be said to individual professing disciples here and there. And certainly it is always requiring to be said to the indifferent man of the world, to whom Gospel principle is a pet aversion and the Spirit of Christ an entire stranger.

And if any one asks, what must I do to be saved,—to be saved from this indifferentism, from this selfishness, from this palling unsatisfactoriness of life, from this thinking and planning and going in the wrong direction; the answer is, Do *the* thing—"Believe on the LORD JESUS CHRIST, and thou shalt be saved." That includes everything, both the One Thing and the "many things!"

VIII

SPOILED!

"And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?"—
JEREMIAH IV, 30.

IT is the nation as a whole that the Prophet is addressing: using the singular number—after the manner of the prophets. He is forecasting trouble,—dissolution and shame. He is telling the people that the end is not far away. The Chaldeans will come ere long, and remove the Hebrews from their place, and sack the city of their pride. They will not be able to stand-up against the invaders. They will succumb. They will be "spoiled." And all that, largely because in various ways they have "spoiled" themselves: by tampering with idolatry, by dabbling-in and delighting-in various types of unrighteousness,—by being disloyal to God and unfaithful to their opportunities. The end will be confusion and helplessness and unavailing remorse. "And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?"

I need scarcely tell you, brethren, that the Hebrews of the seventh century before Christ were not the only nation which has been disloyal to God and false to conscience and careless of its opportunities, and which—in consequence—has succumbed before the persistence of a purer and more progressive people. The later history of Greece and the still later history of Rome, and the still later history of Spain, and what is not unlikely to be

the history of Mexico all tell pretty much the same story. Disruption following upon deterioration. Spoliation from the outside following upon self-spoliation. Confusion and helplessness and failure—due largely to unpreparedness and to the pollution of the moral and spiritual atmosphere.

And today, my friends, some of the younger Peoples of the earth (younger, I mean, in respect of their intellectual and spiritual awakening and in respect of their baptism of modernity—Japan for instance),—today some of the younger Peoples of the earth are watching their chance. They are watching the older Peoples of the earth (and, mark you, in respect of intellectual and spiritual privilege this Commonwealth is one of the older Peoples of the earth after all),—they are watching the older Peoples of the earth, to have-at their inheritance in the event of their losing the vision and becoming supine and secular and sordid. . . . For there is such a thing as a false security. There is such a thing as a success which softens and ‘spoils’ the fibre of a people.

So that it may sometimes have to be said of a whole Nation—as is said in the Old Testament of an individual king,—“But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction.”

Yes, the very security and success of a People may be the beginning of the ‘spoiling’ process. As Browning says in his ‘Paracelsus,’

“You will find all you seek, and perish so.”

“Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.” For, “when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?”

And then, my friends, the history of the Christian Church and some present conditions in the Christian Church read us the same warning.

If men and women are not already demanding, they will very soon be demanding, their rights of the Church of Christ. They will ask the Church to do for them what it was commissioned to do: to feed their souls, to tell them "the truth as it is in Jesus," to give them authoritative moral leading and effective moral dynamic.

But what if the Church of Christ is allowing herself to be "spoiled?" What if she has ceased to "follow the gleam," and is becoming secularized? What if she is losing the breath of inspiration and the note of authority, and making unworthy compromises with the time-spirit? What if a chief reason why so many intelligent and sincere people sit lightly by the Church these days is that they feel the Church is dabbling in too many projects and not concentrating sufficiently on its main concern; that, in short, it is not distinctively spiritual in its appeals and methods?

I say, what if these things are so!—and there is no denying they are partly so. Then, 'when we are spoiled, what shall we do,'—when people turn to us and look to us, and say, "Give us of your heavenly wisdom: feed us with the bread of Life: introduce us to your precious treasures: bring us—what we cannot surely find elsewhere—the touch of Christ, the healing and heartening touch of the Saviour"!

Thank God, there has taken place within the Church, in recent years, a great awakening to her Social responsibilities. And, thank God, I seem to see the initial trem-

blings of another awakening within the Church,—an awakening to her Spiritual responsibilities, a realizing of her unique distinction as the Christ-Bringer to human life.

But, my friends, I wish to apply this text this evening more particularly to the Individual Human. It may be so applied in all fairness. Indeed, it is searchingly applicable to the Individual Life.— “And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?”

There comes a time in every man's life when he finds that he cannot do what he used to do. He cannot walk quite so fast or so far as he could ten or twenty years ago. He cannot see quite so well. He cannot work quite so long. He cannot stand late hours quite so well. And in a dozen different ways he feels that the wear and tear of life—even its ordinary and honorable wear and tear—have been carrying on a sort of ‘spoiling’ process; and he is not what he used to be. . . . It makes him think. It makes him take a sort of inventory of his life. It brings him to size himself up in view of the years and the tasks that lie ahead. And even if he is honorably minded to wear out to the end, instead of rusting out, as Kingsley used to say; yet he cannot help asking himself, ‘When I am spoiled of this alacrity and that, of this capacity-for-work and that, of this type of vigor and that, —(when I am spoiled) what shall I do?’

And then, as in the case of a corporate People—like the ancient Hebrews, so in the case of the individual: the ‘spoiling’ process may be unnaturally and unnecessarily and dishonorably hastened by unrighteousness: by self-

indulgence, say. Will you notice how the prophet here proceeds to illustrate his meaning by a picture? "And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do? Though thou clothest thyself with crimson, though thou deckest thee with ornaments of gold, though thou rentest thy face with painting, in vain shalt thou make thyself fair; thy lovers will despise thee." In other words he instances the experience of a woman who has spoiled her appearance by lust, and who tries in vain to restore her good looks by artificial means and so to regain the blandishments of her beauty. The thing is hopeless. The glory is departed.

And there is a somewhat weird and awfully impressive passage, you remember, in the story of Samson, where we are told how, having fallen into a deep sleep (presumably after an amorous debauch), he was shorn of his hair, and awoke to find that his great strength was gone.— "And his strength went from him. . . . And he awoke out of his sleep, and said, I will go out as at other times before, and shake myself. And he wist not that the Lord was departed from him".

Ay, some people seem to think that they can go on in evil courses *ad infinitum* with impunity. But there is a day of reckoning. "The way of transgressors is hard." And the man of sordid life finds, one day, that he is "spoiled." "And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?"

And then, sometimes the 'spoiling' process is hastened not so much by one's 'spoiling' oneself as by one's being 'spoiled.' Some boys and girls are so pampered in early life, so little disciplined, and so much encouraged to take

their own way and to indulge their every trivial whim,—that, when they come to face the world and to take their places in the battle of life, they are discovered to be sadly lacking in pluck and grit and staying-power. Will you not admit, brethren, that *that* sort of ‘spoiling’ process has reached the stage—in this country anyhow—of being almost alarming? Perhaps the parents are fully more to blame than the children. At any rate, there are some young people I know, to whom—in presence of their parents—I should like to put this question, “And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?”

And the truth is, brethren, the question of our text may fairly and appropriately be asked of each and every one of us at the close of the several periods of our lives. For, as I have already said, there is a ‘spoiling’ process which is natural and inevitable and not to be called dishonorable: I mean, of course, the ‘spoiling’—or taking away—of our opportunities stage after stage of life’s journey.

Boy—Girl! What will YOU do, when the scythe of time has cut away the opportunities of your boyhood—your girlhood: when your school-days are past, and when—perhaps—you have gone out from your home to face the world alone? In other words, are you putting-in all you know just now, are you making all you can of those opportunities which are yours today—but will never come again: so that, when the next stage comes, you will be ready? . . . O, what depth of meaning there is in St. Paul’s word, “Behold, *now* is the accepted time: behold, *now* is the day of salvation!” Yes, do it now: do it now. Tomorrow will be too late for the things of

today.

Or, you, my friend, who are in life's mid-time: bordering on the fifties or the sixties, say: you who are—these very days—doing the work of your life! What will YOU do, when, in the course of nature, you shall be past your best? In other words, are you allowing the toil and turmoil of the world to harden you, to make you now such that you will be blasé and cynical and increasingly selfish to the very end? Are you losing the vision, and forgetting to pray? . . . Or, are you being chastened—day by day—into a deeper trust in God, and into a larger and more alert sympathy with your fellowmen? Are you increasing and abounding in faith, and in hope, and in prayerfulness (because, brethren, we need more prayer as we go on, not less,—let me tell you)?

Do you remember how the XCIst Psalm speaks of our being delivered from “the destruction that wasteth at noon-day?” Well, it has been supposed by many that what the Psalmist means by that phrase is the perils of the middle-aged, the soul-destroying influences of the heat and haste of life's noontide. Anyhow, we know what these influences are. We know how difficult it is—while mingling with the world in the course of our life-tasks—(we know how difficult it is) to keep our ideals high and our purposes pure, and to be true to our best and true to Christ's best. But we know that, spite of the difficulty, it is the right thing. And one shudders and sickens at the discovery (if so it be) that one's tastes have deteriorated, that one's finer touches have become coarsened, that one has—somehow—gotten out of sympathy with the best things and is no longer ‘coveting earnestly the best gifts.’

"And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?"

Verily, then, my friends, WHAT SHALL WE DO, 'when we are spoiled?' 'Spoiled,' I mean, of opportunities which we have failed to improve: 'spoiled,' it may be, of our finer sentiments and our purer purposes: 'spoiled,' it may be, of our interest in Christ and our enthusiasm for Christ.

What shall we do,—indeed?

Well, in the last analysis there is but one thing to do: and that, with all humility and with all our heart and soul. And that one thing is this:—PRAY, pray these prayers of the great Book here, "Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me. .

. . Restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation. .

. . Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

That is the first thing to do: to throw ourselves back on God, to go home to the Father again in Christ's company. As the prophet Isaiah has it, "In returning . . . shall ye be saved."

But let us not forget that "God helps those who help themselves." The road is open, thank God! But neither God nor angel nor priest nor friend can do the stepping for us: we have to use our own limbs for the walking. And so there are some things that the "spoiled" souls can do for themselves.

They can take themselves in hand. They can look the situation square in the face; and say, Things must be different. They can "cut out" this and that, if need be. For a man ought to be lord of his own habits: so

that he can say unto one, Go, and it goeth; and to another, Come, and it cometh.

They can revise their companionships, if need be. For, although some people are thrown in our way, no one can dictate to us who are to be our boon companions and our familiar friends. And mark you, brethren, for the soul's need the choice of a friend is more important than the choice of a school or the choice of a profession.

Then the "spoiled" souls can read better books than they have been reading for some time. They can go back to their Bibles, and to the big books of time: those books which make it nearly impossible for a person to be narrow-minded, or cynical, or worldly, or mawkish.

Yes, indeed, there are all sorts of chains, besides the gold chain of Gospel Grace, by which we can bind ourselves more securely to the best things and so "about the feet of God."

"And when thou art spoiled, what wilt thou do?"

O, my friends, the pathos and the pity of a Wasted Life—of a "Spoiled" Soul! And there are so many: some at fifteen, some at twenty-five, some at forty-five, and so on. The thought of it all is rather crushing. Without the Gospel of Christ, indeed, the thought of it would be unbearable. But *here* there is Grace, and Promise, and Renewal, and Hope.

Yes, thank God, the 'spoiling' process may be stayed and in part reversed and the vanquished become victor, and the "lost" be "saved,"—in CHRIST.

"Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee."

IX

CHRISTIAN COURTESY

"Be courteous."—I PETER III, 8.

IN these days of swift and strenuous living we have lost, in large degree, some of the gentler arts in which our forefathers of—say—a century ago excelled. The use of the telephone is apt to make one rather curt, and the reign of the automobile has somewhat altered our code of manners. While a large percentage of the business letters of today—and even of the friendly letters—contain innumerable sentences in which the predicate is not furnished with a subject. And so forth.

Our excuse is, for the most part, that we haven't time. But after all, brethren, manners are not so much a question of time as a question of taste. And, as Emerson says, "Life is not so short but that there is always time enough for courtesy."

"Be courteous," says the Book here. In other words, it is a precept prompted and authorized by the Spirit of CHRIST.

We are accustomed to think—and we are well warranted in thinking—that Gospel grace has to do chiefly with the inner man, with the "first springs of thought and will," with the heart. Yes, but our hearts' affections and impulses are bound to *express* themselves. Consequently we may surely expect that whatever affections and impulses have been touched by the Spirit of Christ will express themselves in becoming fashion.

One's manners, then, should be the index of one's character. "Manners are the shadows of virtue," says Sidney Smith. Or, as Tennyson puts it his 'Guinevere' (and he has other like passages),

"For manners are not idle, but the fruit

"Of loyal nature and of noble mind."

Of course we know that some people *are* worse than their manners. Out of compliment to goodness they put on a veneer of virtuous manners,—while all the time they are sneaks or scoundrels. Yes, as Shakespeare makes Hamlet say,

"One may smile, and smile, and be a villain."

While there are other people who *are* better than their manners. They have an awkward and unhappy knack of putting their worst side out. We may take it as generally true, however, that a good man will have good manners, and will "be courteous."

It is a most unhappy mistake to suppose that 'piety is an enemy to courtesy.' It is not: it is its 'helper and friend.' No doubt many incivilities and harshnesses have been perpetrated in the name of Christian rectitude and Christian witness-bearing and truth-at-any-cost, and so forth. But these incivilities and harshnesses cannot have been necessary; and if a rude rectitude has often prevailed, it has prevailed in spite of its rudeness—not because of it.

"The style is the man," is a favorite saying which has come down from antiquity.

In some cases the *manner* is nearly everything. There have been individuals, indeed, who have made great im-

pressions in spite of their awkward methods. Emerson, we are told, often stumbled and stuttered in the delivery of a lecture, and lost his place every now and again. Phillips Brooks read his sermons very closely and very rapidly—with the manuscript usually held in his hand almost up to his eyes. But such men were giants,—the very exceptions that prove the rule. For we all know how important to a speaker or a singer a pleasing manner is, and how important style is to one who is making literary ventures.

And so "virtue itself" is apt to offend "when coupled with forbidding manners." "Speaking the truth in love," says St. Paul, you remember, in one place: as if to remind us that one may be true, and yet tender; that one may be courageous, and yet courteous; that one may speak one's mind, and yet be the gentleman.

But do not let us imagine that Courtesy is wholly an affair of manner—of outward demeanor. It must be in the heart first. In fact the word translated "courteous" here means literally 'friendly-minded.'

Yes, there is a courtesy of inner sentiment, there is courtesy of thought. To be hospitable to our finest feelings, to deal politely and respectfully with the best thoughts which visit us, to adopt—in our own inmost souls—a sympathetic and brotherly attitude towards our fellow-men of every class and creed and clime: and so on. *That* is to ensure an unfailing courtesy in our daily walk and conversation.

Yes, it must be in the heart first. And so, you see, my friends, the best place to go to learn good manners is

the school of CHRIST.

How uniformly courteous HE was! Perhaps we do not give enough attention to this feature of His character and address. He is never expressly called "courteous" by any of the Evangelists; but it is abundantly evident that He was so. Courteous to the man in the street, as well as to the occupants of the palace. Courteous to Samaritans and Syrians and Greeks, as well as to pure-blooded Hebrews. Courteous to the sinners and outcasts among the people, as well as to the clean-living and the respectable. Courteous to His enemies, as well as to His friends. Courteous to His disciples when they were hopelessly misunderstanding Him, as well as when they caught His meaning in the flash of the moment. And what was the sacrifice on Calvary if it was not a great act of courtesy: an unprecedented exhibition of trust in human kind, of regard for the deepest cravings and the purest aspirations of the human heart—however encrusted and be-smearred?

In so much that some one has said, 'I believe from my heart that no one lives near to CHRIST, no one follows Him in 'lowliness, patience, and charity,' who will ever be really an ill-behaved man. He may be ignorant of many of the customs of what is called 'good society,' he may not be what the world calls 'refined;' but he will never be coarse, vulgar, offensive."

O, my friends, we do not require to study hand-books on the usages of polite society. The New Testament here is a sufficient guide. The Spirit of Christ will teach us infallibly well. For "if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature,"—with

“nobler modes of life,
“With sweeter manners, purer laws.”

And so, you see, my Friends, as followers of the CHRIST, we are aiming at something better than common courtesy: we are aiming at Christian courtesy.

Common courtesy is a pleasing thing enough; but genuine Christian courtesy is a bigger thing altogether,—broader and longer and deeper and higher.

For one thing, it is Positive. It knows how to take the initiative. Some people, you know, who cannot be accused of having boorish manners, have no manners at all. They seem never to be able to go out of themselves and to create an atmosphere of welcome and good cheer. They never meet you half-way,—let alone coming to you all the way. But the Christ-filled soul is not content with that sort of thing. He seeks people. He invites people. He brings to them the positive touch of brotherly-kindness. And the weakness of the weak and the timidity of the timid and the shamefacedness of the shame-laden make a double appeal to him. So that in the name of Christ and in the Spirit of Christ he makes them feel at home. I sometimes wish, brethren, that we had a little more of that positive Christian courtesy in the Church itself: for sometimes—even there—it is conspicuous by its absence, and the Church is the last place where some people are allowed to feel at home. And, mark you this: don't allow the minister to do all the hand-shaking and all the inviting,—you should be able to do it far less professionally and far more spontaneously than I can.

Then again, genuine Christian courtesy is a thoroughly

Unselfish thing. We are often pre-occupied, we are often fatigued, we are often worried. And it is so easy to be off-hand, to be brusque, to be nearly rude in such circumstances. Well, you remember of an occasion when Jesus was exceeding tired and craved rest, but the people followed Him in throngs and waited with Him so long that they, in turn, were weary and hungry. What did the Master do? His disciples advised Him to send the people away. But no—HE would not do that. Instead, he took pains to feed the hungry multitude,—doing it, too, methodically and more than sufficiently. O yes, almost anyone can be affable and cheerful when he is “feeling good:” but the test is to be affable and cheerful and to inspire others to the same—when one is “not feeling like it.” Let us never forget, my friends, that JESUS has come into this world, not simply to coddle and flatter the natural man, but to remake him—to make him a new man—to enable him to do by grace what he could hardly hope to do by nature.

Then, what about courtesy to our Opponents? A true sportsman (in athletic circles) shews the same respect to his rivals that he shews to the members of his own team or club. When, in fact, two men enter the ring for a prize-fight or a wrestling bout, the first thing they do is to shake hands. Surely, then, the disciple of Christ is not going to be outdone by the ordinary athlete. It is told that, during the war between the Greeks (under Alexander the Great) and the Persians (under Darius), one of the Persian soldiers thought to ingratiate himself with his general—Memnon by name—by inveighing with all his might against Alexander the Great. Memnon touched

the soldier with his spear, and said to him, "Friend, I pay you to fight against Alexander, not to revile him." Just so, my friends, let us cultivate the *courtesy* of patriotism. Let us be assured that "patriotism is not Christian unless it is sympathetic and fraternal." In other words, let us bear in mind that the Britisher loves his country as the American loves his, and the German likewise, and the Japanese likewise, and the Mexican likewise. He is a poor patriot whose patriotism consists in assuming that "all other nations" but his own "are to be either scoffed at or pitied." By the imprimatur of the Lord Jesus Christ we are all 'citizens of the world,' and dare not be discourteous—even in warfare—to any one of the great family of nations. Indeed, brethren, when the Christian peoples of the world are once convinced of that, as they surely will be ere long, war—like witch-burning and slavery—will be a thing of the past:

"Till, members of one Body,

Our agony shall cease:

Till the souls that sit in darkness

Behold the Prince of Peace."

Then, what about courtesy to Strangers? I read to you this evening part of king Solomon's prayer at the dedication of the Temple. Did you notice how, after seeking the help of God—by anticipation—for individuals who might be wronged and for the people as a whole in times of defeat and of drought and of pestilence, and the like, he suddenly switches off (so to speak) and remembers the stranger: "Moreover concerning the stranger, which is not of thy people Israel, but is come

from a far country, . . . if they come and pray in this house; then hear Thou from the heavens, even from Thy dwelling-place, and do according to all that the stranger calleth to Thee for," and so on? I have always been greatly touched by that interlude (as one might call it)—that interlude in behalf of the stranger in Solomon's great national prayer. And surely, my friends, in this Country—of all countries—we have need to cultivate Christian courtesy towards the strangers. There are three ways in which we may deal with the Immigrant. We may shut the gate in his face, and tell him he is not wanted. Or we may leave him severely alone, and let him muddle along for himself. Or we may receive him with something like cordiality, and offer him a good education and, if possible, a Church home. Which of these three courses, think you, does Christian courtesy suggest? . . .

And there is another type of stranger in this Country,—the descendants of men and women who were brought across the sea against their will—long years ago—in chains. But what I have to say about them was said for me years ago by Daniel Webster. For the story goes that on one occasion, as Webster was walking with a friend in the city of Washington, a colored man—passing—made him a most respectful bow,—Webster returning the compliment in similar fashion. "Do you bow so to a darkey?" asked his friend. "Certainly," replied the statesman, "would you have me outdone in politeness by a negro?"

And then, my friends, let us never omit to be courteous to the Children. Sometimes they seem, in their frolicsomeness, to be independent of our attention. Sometimes

they seem, on the other hand, to be almost embarrassed by our attention. But they appreciate it all the same; and we cannot be too kind to them. Only, let it not be patronizing kindness: we cannot afford to patronize the children,—we must respect them. I fancy many of you have heard how Trebonius—Martin Luther's teacher—used always to raise his hat meaningfully when he came into his class-room (which was not the common custom just then in Germany). When asked why he did so, he said, "Who can tell who may yet rise up amongst these youths? There may be among them, for aught we know, learned doctors, sage legislators, nay, princes of the empire." He was not far mistaken, indeed: for there—one of the little lads—was "the monk that shook the world." And, my friends, we may never forget that

"A little child the Saviour came,
The Mighty God was still His name,
And angels worshipped as He lay
The seeming infant of a day."

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones."

And so I would say, last of all—and in just a very few words, let us be always courteous to CHRIST. We may have our various opinions as to the Divinity of Jesus, and as to the precise significance of His sacrificial death, and as to the actuality of His bodily resurrection, and so forth. And we do not all love the Saviour with the same intensity or with the same intelligence. But surely, to say the least of it, we are going to treat Him with perfect courtesy. Surely we shall give Him a fair hearing and a warm welcome, as HE pleads with us through His Word and by His Spirit; and do no violence to His sensitive soul.

X

COMPLAINING

"And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord."
—JOSHUA XI, 1.

IT is by no means easy for us today, and in our very different circumstances, to understand the case of the Israelites as they travelled from Egypt to Canaan, to appreciate their somewhat unusual experiences in the course of that wilderness journey. In many respects they were well "guided" and well "guarded" and well "graced:" God "fed thee with manna," says the old record in another place, (God "fed thee with manna), .

. . . Thy raiment waxed not old upon thee, neither did thy foot swell, these forty years" All the same there must have been not a few hardships and not a few discouragements. And so we read from time to time, in the record of that strange journey, of "the murmurings of the children of Israel," and of their 'complaining.' And it is expressly said here that "when the people complained, it displeased the Lord:"

'Complaining' is one of those half-regrettable prerogatives of *human* nature. It is remarkable how seldom the lower animals 'complain.' A lion will roar and spring and tear and devour. A dog will growl and possibly bite. A horse may buck or kick. But it is simply wonderful how patient and uncomplaining, after all, most of the

lower animals are. And, strange to say, those of them that we fetter most securely and use most unsparingly (the horse, for example) are the most patient and uncomplaining of all. It has been largely reserved for *humans* to do the complaining and, in consequence, to 'displease the LORD.' And some of us are experts at the business,—

. . . the more shame to us. For, among the "ungodly men" against whom the New Testament—in one part—inveighs, there are mentioned those who are "murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts: and their mouth speaketh great swelling words."

"And when the people complained, it displeased the Lord."

Of course it does not always 'displease the Lord' when we complain. For there are complaints *and* complaints.

For instance, some 'complaints' are justifiable, and reasonable, and useful. Forceful perhaps, but without violence: biting perhaps, but without bitterness. Such are our righteous protests against iniquity,—against dishonesty or against infidelity or against inhumanity or against crass laziness, and the like. 'Complainings' of that type are, in many cases, the indispensable preliminary of progress: according to Phillips Brooks's saying that "discontent which has an ideal is progress."

Then, again, there are some 'complaints' which are so innocently natural and so intensely human and so intensely pathetic, that, far from 'displeasing' the Father, they appeal to His compassion and to His "grace to help in time of need." When the stricken soul says, in the language of the Psalms, "Give ear to my prayer, O God;

. . . attend unto me, and hear me: I mourn in my complaint,"—that sort of thing goes to the heart of the Father; because that sort of thing is prayer, not petulance.

But, my friends, after all has been said, the majority of our 'complaints,' our "murmurings," our querulousnesses are 'displeasing to the Lord' and are not "approved in Christ." In point of fact they are 'displeasing' to most normal humans: because they are more or less unreasonable, and more or less cowardly—unmanly or unwomanly. Yes, 'complaining' displeases sensible and sanctified humanity; and it displeases "the Lord." Why? Because it is wrong, because it is discordant: and because, therefore, it is *essentially* 'displeasing.'

There are some people who 'complain' as a matter of disposition and habit. To quote the Epistle of Jude again, "These are murmurers, complainers." No matter how things are, they will find something to grumble at—something to "knock." As the saying goes, they will 'quarrel with their own shadows' if there is nothing else to quarrel with or to kick at.

It is very depressing. It is very aggravating. But there they are—the habitual 'complainers.' And 'displeasing'—unpleasant—is a mild word for it all. It is despicable, as well as 'displeasing;' and damaging, as well as despicable. Remember, my friends, when it is said of any kind of conduct that 'it displeases the Lord,' that means something very serious. It is a very grave condemnation.

To be sure, the habitual 'complainers' usually tell us—to excuse themselves—that they are "built that way."

. . . Brethren, Jesus Christ never asked the moral delinquents whom He took in hand whether they had been "built that way." He simply said, "Repent:" which word means (let me tell you) 'Turn around: change your mind, and change your life: from henceforth be different.' Of course He offered the help of His omnipotent grace to those who should repent . . . It is all very well for me to say, in explanation of some innocent habit of speech or action, that I suppose I was "made that way." But to try to justify my moral distortions by saying any such thing would be to deny the right of the Spirit of Christ to change me and the power of the Spirit of Christ to keep me changed.

Then, I wish to say that there are some things that we allow ourselves—far too easily allow ourselves—to 'complain' of, day in day out. Yet, why should we?

For example, why 'complain' of Sickness?

I presume the Christian Scientist would say that sickness is a sort of illusion, and that therefore we should disillusionize ourselves by ignoring it and rising superior to it. Well, there is a hint of Christian courage and Christian confidence in that attitude to the "natural shocks that flesh is heir to." I prefer, however, to think of sickness as a very real thing, but an enemy to human health and human happiness; and, therefore, a thing to be combated and conquered—by one means and another. What then? Does a soldier 'complain' of the superior sharpness of his enemy's bayonet or the superior power of his guns? Or, does a ball-player 'complain' of the superior skill of this and that member of the rival team? Nay, verily: the sol-

dier or the ball-player who is anything of a sportsman wishes to win handsomely, wishes to win—if it may be—against heavy odds. Similarly, my friends, if there is anything of the sportsman about us, we shall not ‘complain’ of sickness—in whatever form it may come: we shall try to play a winning game. And, if we lose fighting gamely, we shall not lose at all in God’s sight or in our own conscience’s sight. I was referring the other Sunday to Robertson of Brighton. Well, he died at an early age of a very serious and very painful malady. Time and again, we are told, when the pain was excruciating, he would clutch something or grind his teeth and bite his lips: but he never uttered a word of ‘complaint,’ except perhaps to say, “Just leave me alone.”

Or, again, why ‘complain’ of the Weather?

Do you know, to my mind there is nothing makes a person appear so utterly puny and ridiculous as railing at the weather and calling it all sorts of names. No doubt to the farmer, for instance, at certain seasons of the year the state of the weather is everything. But—to say the least of it—we can’t alter the weather by grumbling and cursing. (I am not prepared to assert that we can alter the weather by praying either: but prayer is more likely to avail than petulance). Besides, men are learning as time goes on to offset, to some extent, the damage that may be done by excessive drought or by an excessive rainfall: (if you don’t know how, ask the expert agriculturists). There is a famous saying of John Ruskin to the effect that there is no such thing as “bad weather”—only “different kinds of good weather.” And doesn’t James Whitcomb Riley say,

"It's no use to grumble and complain;
It's just as cheap and easy to rejoice:
When God sorts the weather, and sends rain,
Why, rain's my choice."

And here is another wholesome saying that I came across the other day, "If you can't sing as you go along life's road, don't help the thunder to growl and drown the other fellow's singing."

Again, why 'complain' of Other Folks' Prosperity and Happiness? Some of us are all too prone to do that. Perhaps we envy our neighbors their prosperity and happiness, and make it very obvious that we do. Or perhaps we try to account for their success by insinuating that it is due to mere good luck, or even to trickery and crookedness. Well, my friends, as the Scripture says, 'Envy is . . . rottenness of the bones' and it "slayeth the silly one": and insinuations are usually rather base things. Anyhow, this whole attitude—this "complaining" and grudging attitude—towards other people's prosperity and success is hopelessly wrong. It is essentially un-Christian. Are we not told, here, to "rejoice with them that do rejoice?" It may be a difficult thing for unsanctified humanity to do; but to those who have "the mind of Christ" it should be a privilege and a joy. You remember how John the Baptist (noble man that he was: to my mind one of the very finest of the Men of the Bible)—you remember what he said, and the magnificent spirit of it, when he was told of the rising popularity of Jesus: "He that hath the bride is the bridegroom: but the friend of the bridegroom, which standeth and heareth him, rejoiceth greatly because of the bridegroom's voice: this my

joy therefore is fulfilled. HE must increase, but I must decrease." Splendidly magnanimous, thou man of the desert!

Then, once more I will say, why 'complain' of Criticism? Most of us—especially those of us who are in public positions—will be criticised to the end of our days. That is inevitable. Sometimes the criticism will be fair and justifiable: other times, unfair and unjustifiable. Any way, we shall not help matters by "complaining." If the criticism is unjust, it deserves no notice: if it is just, it should spur a fellow on to improvement: so that of Criticism we may say, 'Either ignore it, or act upon it,'—but do not 'complain.' It is related of a singer of ancient Greece that when once he was told that the very boys laughed at his singing, he simply said, "Ah, then I must learn to sing better." And it is related of the great philosopher Plato that, when some one once told him that he had many enemies who spoke much ill of him, his answer was, "It is no matter; I shall live so that none will believe them." Yes, my friends, we twentieth century Christians have not a few things to learn from the moral and spiritual heroes of pre-Christian times. . . .

Have you ever noticed, my friends, how entirely *free from 'complaining'* JESUS was—the "Crystal Christ?" There is no passage in His mortal career (so far as we know that career: and you may be sure we should have had the flaws pointed out, had they been there)—there is no passage in His mortal career to which the word petulance or the word querulous or the word "complained" could possibly be made to apply.

We read, indeed, of His being hungry and thirsty and weary; and of His being "exceeding sorrowful" (no wonder!); and—once—of His being "in an agony" (no wonder!). We are told, too, how He "marvelled" at human unbelief and indifference. We are told, too, how He could be stolidly silent in the face of cross-questioning; before Pilate, for instance. Nay more, when occasion warranted it, He could slash, and He could pierce as with rapier-thrusts, the sins and abuses of His day; especially the sins of self-complacency and self-righteousness. But, brethren, in the life of JESUS I see no least hint of 'complaining:' no

"lack of grace

"Even in torture's grasp, or sleep's, or death's."

"O perfect Life of Love!"

Suppose we ask now—by way of closing our meditation this morning—(suppose we ask), How are we to get rid of our tendency to 'complain?' How are we to approach nearer and nearer to the "sweet reasonableness" of JESUS—to His crystal courtesy and His complaintless confidence in God and in Himself and in Humankind? HOW?

Well, here are four points,—each in just a sentence or two (you can do the filling-in for yourselves).

First, then, attend to your *health*. We can never set too much store by the healing ministry of Jesus, and His Gospel of good health and good cheer. I believe dyspepsia is responsible for at least fifty per cent. of humanity's crankinesses and grumbles. Some of us need—for *our souls'* sakes—to take more exercise,

or to keep more regular hours, or to pay more attention to our diet. "A man's daily meals," says Dr. Jowett, "have vital relationship with his vision of the Lord." "Beloved," says a New Testament Epistle, "I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health".

Next,—*Think more of others, and less of yourself.* 'Complaining' is born of selfishness. And selfishness means having no outlook, having no wideness of horizon, having no regard for "the things of others." "Your love," it has been said, "has a broken wing, if it cannot fly across the sea." Ay, and some folks' love has apparently both wings "broken;" for it cannot fly across the street—let alone the sea. And then we know the standard that Christ proposes: "kind" even "unto the unthankful and the evil." "When I don't like folks," an American authoress makes one of her characters say, "(when I don't like folks) I try to do somethin' nice for 'em. Seems like that's the only way I kin weed out my own meanness."

Next, my friends, let us *study the sublime example of our Lord Jesus Christ.* Are we really trying to pattern our lives after His? Or, do we stop at admiring, and 'following afar off?' *That* wont do: we must take Christ seriously. "For even hereunto were ye called: CHRIST . . . leaving us an example, that we should follow His steps."

And next—and last,—there is *Prayer.* That is the one answer to all such smart and self-complacent and hopeless sayings as "I Can't help it: I was built that way;" and, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks:" and the like. I say, *that* is the one answer to all such sayings and sentiments,—PRAYER. Of course most of us are far,

far yet from "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ." But, how are we to get there? Only by the help of God's grace in Christ. Why not, then, "pray without ceasing" for the increase of that grace? Yes, indeed, prayer is not just pouring out our wants before God: rather it is opening our hearts to the Divine influences that they may *pour in*,—that we may be "filled with all the fulness of God." The door that leads to the Throne of God is never closed. "To your knees, O ye Christians."

XI

WAS EVER ANYONE DISAPPOINTED IN JESUS?

"And they that were sent went their way, and found even as He had said unto them."—LUKE XIX, 32.

I HAVE read to you this evening the portion of the Gospel record in which the words of our text occur; so that you know their setting. "Two of His disciples" had been sent by Jesus on a somewhat quaint errand,—with explicit instructions and with an unusually detailed intimation of what they might expect to find: "and they that were sent went their way, and found even as He had said unto them." They were not disappointed. The Master's words came true, and His intimations were fulfilled with amazing accuracy.

It was not the first time the disciples of Jesus had "found even as He had said unto them:" nor was it to be the last time. And so elsewhere in the New Testament you have our Lord Jesus described as "the faithful witness" and "He that is true." And St. Paul says, in one place, that "all the promises of God in Him are Yea . . . and Amen."

"And they . . . found even as He had said unto them." My friends, was any one ever disappointed in JESUS? Has it not always been the case with those who have trusted Him fully and loved Him fervently and served Him faithfully,—has it not always been the case

with such that they have "found even as He had said unto them?" I have yet to know of the man or woman—given fairmindedness and true-heartedness—(I have yet to know of the man or woman) who has been disappointed in Jesus. Or, as I saw it remarked the other day, "The religion of Jesus Christ has never proved a failure where it was fairly tested." . . .

O, you may have been disappointed, perhaps, in one or other of the Christian Doctrines. It may have been crudely presented to you, so as to fail to appeal. Or, however presented, it may have seemed to you remote from common life and inefficacious. . . . And, indeed, we shall do well to be disappointed—and for ever disappointed—with *some* dogmas that are asserted to be fundamentally Christian.

Or, you may have been disappointed in the Church,—not recognizing in it "the body of Christ" in anything like soundness of health or beauty of proportion. You may have been disappointed by the somewhat worldly atmosphere of the Christian Church; or by the formality or the coldness or the slackness that are too often found in it.

. . . And, indeed, we shall do well to be disappointed—and for ever disappointed—with some features of modern Church activity,—and inactivity.

Or, you may be disappointed with the results of the whole Christian propaganda,—as if the Lord Jesus Christ were not 'making good,' were not 'coming to his own' quickly enough, were not proving worthy of the name said to be written on His vesture—"King of kings, and Lord of lords." . . . And, indeed, brethren, we shall do well to be disappointed—and disappointed every day—

with Results; if so be it will make us more "fervent in spirit" and more alert and diligent in the work of the Kingdom

Or, you may have been disappointed in individual followers of the Christ here and there: disappointed by reason of their inconsistencies, or their lack of zeal, or their woeful want of loyalty to their Church and to their comrades in Christ. There is great room, indeed, for disappointment here,—for chagrin,—for deep discouragement. Only, in all this connection let us remember the Apostolic verse, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

For—yes—you may have been disappointed in yourself: disappointed because of the meagreness of your Christian achievement, because of your frequent lack of courage or of charity, because of the immense distance between your spiritual stature and "the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ."

Yes, in scores of ways, my friends, we may have been disappointed in the human way of taking Jesus, in the human way of treating Him and responding to His claims, in the human presentation of the truth of the Gospel and the spirit of the Gospel. But,—disappointed in JESUS Himself? Never!—"And they . . . found even as He had said unto them."

How many souls can bear witness that JESUS has always been true to Himself and true to His word,—and, so, true to them! This, you know, is Hallow-e'en,—tomorrow being All Saints Day. Just think, then, of the

tens of thousands of Jesus' Friends who would gladly—could they make us hear them—testify to His faithfulness, to His absolute reliability, to His sure fulfilment of their best convictions and hopes. When the aged and saintly Polycarp of Smyrna, in the second century, was brought before the Roman Proconsul,—condemned to be burnt to death if he would not renounce the Christian faith, the Proconsul said to him, “Recant, and I will set thee free. Revile Christ.” “Eighty and six years have I served Him,” answered the martyr, “(eighty and six years have I served Him), and He has never disappointed me. How then can I speak evil of my King?” And I was reading the other day of a woman of India, named Chundra Lela, whose name is now a household word among the Christians of India, and whose face, by the way, if a photograph is to be trusted at all, is a study in quiet and confident faith. Chundra Lela was born enormously wealthy. While still an adherent of Hinduism, she spent practically all her wealth in making long and hard pilgrimages to various shrines “just to find God,” as she said. By and by she fell in with the Bible and with a Christian teacher who led her to “find God” indeed through Christ. When she had grown old in years and in Christian service, it was arranged that a small house be built for her to end her days in restfully. When the retired spot where the house was to be built was pointed out to her, she said, “What! away off in this field? Oh, no! If you will build me a house, build it on the roadside—close up—so that when I am too old and weak to walk, I may crawl up to the door and preach to the people as they pass by.” It was so ordered, and so

done; and as long as Chundra Lela lived, she did preach "the unsearchable riches of Christ." And when, a few years ago, "the door into the Other Room opened" for her, "she went with a shining face" Was that woman disappointed in Jesus? . . . These are but two instances taken at random from totally different times. And you know very well, my friends, that they could be multiplied by a hundred many times over.

Truly, it is not JESUS who disappoints us: it is you and I who disappoint ourselves—and disappoint Him. It is not JESUS, today, who is disappointing the world: it is those who are 'crucifying the Son of God afresh, and putting Him to an open shame,' but who—let us hope—"know not what they do."

"And they that were sent went their way, and found even as HE had said unto them."

In how many ways we 'find . . . even as HE has said!' Not that, in the varying and succeeding Christian centuries, every word of the Master has been literally and actually and in every specific instance fulfilled. But that the soul of His teaching is always true; ay and not seldom intimately and specifically true.

How often, for instance, we 'find' and feel the truth of Christ's words when He states some vital fact of the spiritual world! Such as, "No man can serve two masters;" or, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth;" or, "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Why, brethren, we cannot gainsay such words as these. We cannot get back of them. There is no arguing with them.

We know that they are true. Every one of us who thinks at all could produce dozens of instances of the truth of them. No wonder we read that HE spoke "as one having authority."

Then sometimes, again, Christ's words are pathetically and bitterly true; and we 'find even as HE says' in the pathos and bitterness of our own personal experience or of the general human situation. For example, these words to His disciples, "In the world ye shall have tribulation." Or, these other words to His disciples, "The servant is not greater than his lord. If they have persecuted Me, they will also persecute you; if they have kept My saying, they will keep yours also." Or that little saying of His on the uncertainty of human life and the apparent lack of discrimination on the part of the Angel of Death,— "Then shall two be in the field; the one shall be taken, and the other left:" what commentaries we could all produce on these never so simple words! Or, in the light of what is happening these days, such words as these,— "And ye shall hear of wars and rumors of wars: . . . for nation shall rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom: and there shall be famines, and pestilence, and earthquakes, in divers places." Truly, my friends, Jesus is not dead: He spoke but yesterday, and He is speaking again today. "Today if ye will hear His voice, harden not your heart."

But, to come right back to our text, how often what JESUS says is encouragingly and cheerfully true!—"They . . . found even as He had said unto them." These men were sent on a kindly, albeit on what must have seemed to them a somewhat doubtful, errand for the

Master: but they were not fooled. Even so the Master is not fooling us when He takes the deep look and the long look, and speaks calmly His great words of faith and promise and encouragement. How many of them there are! "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away:" "He that endureth to the end shall be saved:" "Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God:" "In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world:" "And they shall come from the east, and from the west, and from the north, and from the south, and shall sit down in the kingdom of God." What heart for us all in such brave and encouraging and far-visioned words! For they are true. Any single one of them you can substantiate up to the hilt from the testimony of Christian experience and the witness of Christian history.

The pity is, my friends, that we do not feed on what JESUS says far more than we do. It was an Oriental magnate—not himself, by the way, a professed Christian—who said recently, "Of one thing I am convinced, that, do what we will, oppose it as we may, it is the Christian Bible that will sooner or later work out the regeneration of our land." And, surely, if the Christian Bible, then, in particular, the very words of the CHRIST Himself. You remember how He remarked, on one occasion, "The words that I speak unto you, they are spirit, and they are life." O yes, we should not be nearly so "spirit"-less, and our better feelings and our better purposes would not be so nearly "dead," if we would keep in closer touch with what JESUS says and try to get to the heart of it all.

And then, my friends, besides the sayings and sentiments of Jesus recorded for us in this great Book, there are, as I have already assumed, the testimony of Christian experience and the witness of Christian history. In other words, there are the suggestions and the successes of the Spirit of Christ of all time to encourage us, to assure us that, in respect of our highest ideals and our best convictions and our holiest purposes and our most unselfish projects, we shall not be fooled nor disappointed. "And they that were sent went their way, and found even as He had said unto them." There are half-a-dozen words in one of Emerson's Essays which come again and again to my mind: they are these, "Trust the instinct to the end." Even so, my friends, if the Spirit of Christ has taken possession of you in any degree whatsoever, then He pleads with you, from time to time, to think along certain lines, and to project your life in a certain direction, and to be true to your highest aspirations: and, from time to time, He prompts you to do the Christlike thing. Well, the great point is to "trust" these pleadings and promptings "to the end." No matter where they may lead you, they are infallibly right, and you will 'find even as they say.' O yes, men have been misunderstood for obeying the pleadings and promptings of the Spirit of Christ. They have been persecuted for doing so. They have lost "houses, or brethren, or sisters, or father, or mother, or wife, or children, or lands" for doing so. They have been done to death for doing so. But they have never been fooled of God for doing so. They have never been disappointed by the King of Truth—who is also the King of Love. You remember how it is said of the redeemed in glory (it

is in the Book of Revelation), "And they shall see His face" Why? Because they have seen "His face" all the time. Though often "mazed with doubts and sick with fears," and though often fighting their way through the fire of hate and the smoke of opposition, they have 'seen His Face'—His smile of approval and good cheer and of promised welcome . . . — "And they that were sent went their way, and found even as He had said unto them." O yes, my friends, we may trust HIM to the crack of doom. He will not disappoint us. Trust *that* instinct to the end.

But I have one more thing to say before I finish this evening. Will you notice how it says that "they that were sent *went their way*, and found even as He had said unto them?"

The only way to arrive at the Truth of Christ and the satisfaction of the Gospel is to *go*: they "went their way, and found." In the spiritual realm, as in most others,—but supremely in the spiritual realm—Obedience is the way to Knowledge, experiment the way to experience. Knowing only comes by Doing. Hearsay is not enough. Argument is only of limited value. And you can't 'go and find' by proxy. You must start out, and keep going, your very self. A general cannot hope to win a battle by simply drawing a map and studying the field from a distance and counting up how many soldiers he has in barracks. He and his men must get there. Precisely so, brethren, if you and I are to 'find' the truth of what Jesus says and what Jesus stands for—if we are ever to know the inspiration of it all and the comfort of it all,—

we must, like these two loyal disciples of old, take JESUS at His word and go where He asks us. And you and I know pretty well just what that means in our several experiences: "Lord, what wilt Thou have *me* to *do*?"

O, the road may be hard at times,—steep and stony and stormy and dark—and what not. But the end is "righteousness, and peace, and joy," and the soul's awakening, and the vision of God.

And remember, brethren, I am not thinking exclusively, by any means, of "righteousness, and peace, and joy" and the soul's awakening and the vision of God—up yonder. We may experience it all here and now: if, here and now, we will take JESUS at His Word, and go where He asks us.

"And they that were sent went their way, and found even as HE had said unto them."

It is always so.

XII

DISTRACTIONS

"And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone."—I KINGS XX, 40.

THE circumstances were as follows. Benhadad, the king of Syria, had made a double attempt to put the Israelites to shame in battle, but had failed. Ahab, the king of Israel, had had every chance to make Benhadad prisoner; but, in an injudicious excess of soft-heartedness, he had let him go. It was a weak stroke on Ahab's part, and a wrong stroke. "Foolish pity spoils the city." One of the prophets of Israel, disguised, meets Ahab, tells him the story of his own carelessness in allowing a prisoner to escape, and thus inveigles Ahab into condemning himself out of his own mouth.

"As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." That was the story of the careless guard and the escaped prisoner. It was really also the story of Ahab's carelessness and of *his* lost opportunity.

It is open to question whether the prophet was stating a fact or merely using a parable. Anyhow, the application to Ahab's conduct was obvious. And it seems to me that the story or parable is, in many respects, applicable to US—to the men and women of today in America.

"And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone." It is just a quiet, but pungent, protest against carelessness, against lack of concentration, against infidel-

ity to the main task. Because we are "busy here and there," and NOT ON THE JOB, we miss ever so many of the most precious lessons of life, and let go ever so many of the most blessed opportunities of life, and fail to conserve some of life's most strategic and important conquests. We allow ourselves to be turned aside from the Main Issue by preventible distractions, and—too often—petty and unworthy distractions—"Busy here and there."

The truth is, in almost every region of experience there is a particular moment to take advantage of: a particular thing to be done, at a particular time, in a particular way. To allow oneself to be distracted at the critical moment, instead of concentrating, is fatal.

To be used to advantage, fruit must be pulled neither too soon nor too late. There is something far wrong when the farmer neglects his apple-orchard at the critical moment and allows the fruit to rot,—because he is "busy here and there." He should not be "here and there" at all, but ON THE SPOT.

Metals in fusion must be taken at the right time, if they are to be moulded as we wish them. "Strike while the iron is hot."

Similarly there are certain of the world's harbors which can only be negotiated by large vessels at high tide.

And so, doesn't Shakespeare say,

"There is a tide in the affairs of men

"Which taken at the flood leads on to fortune;

"Omitted, all the voyage of their life

"Is bound in shallows and in miseries."

I knew a farmer in Scotland, who was considerably criticised for one thing and another by certain narrow-

minded neighbors. But he used often to say to me, "Well, I may be this and I may be that, but *I'm aye there when I'm wanted.*" He was one of the great army of the RELIABLES.

"And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone" I do not wish to suggest that we should be narrow in our sympathies and exclusive in our pursuits. As a rule, the man of one idea, or the man of one book, or the man of one interest (be it even his appointed life-work) is neither specially agreeable nor specially useful. Besides his Vocation in life, a man should, if possible, have his Avocation (that is, some pursuit or hobby over and above his usual toil), and also his Vacation (his times of relaxation and recreation and mirth and merriment).

Life is too fair and too rich, and has too many facets, for any one with a Soul to be having his nose perpetually at the grindstone. Let us, indeed, look up and down and hither and thither. Let us cull from the various treasures that we have access to. Let us get all we can of Instruction and of wholesome Amusement, and so forth, out of life. *But*, "First Things First." By all and every means let us not neglect the MAIN ISSUE. The occasional distractions of life have their place and function; just as the *centrifugal* forces of gravitation have their place and function. But, after all, the *centripetal* forces are the more important; for without the *centripetal* forces this earth of ours would not hold together and would not keep in its orbit for a moment. The occasional distractions of life, then, have their place and function; but the great thing is CONCENTRATION,—

especially with regard to one's Appointed Life Work. No man has ever excelled in business, no man has ever excelled as an artist or as a public speaker, who has allowed himself to be perpetually "busy here and there," instead of giving his thought and time and toil to the main task.

In one view of it the Concentration may have to be concentration on details: as when a notable artist sat for hours throwing pebbles into a smooth lake of water, and watching, in order that he might be perfectly sure of the appearance of a surface of water when so disturbed.

In another view of it the concentration must be concentration on the work as a whole—and the progress and issue of it. In which case it is in the way of becoming CONSECRATION.

"And whatsoever ye do, do heartily,—as to the Lord, and not unto men: . . . for ye serve the Lord Christ."

Brethren, I cannot see how any man or woman who has caught the CHRIST CONCEPTION OF LIFE can be content to 'putter' through life. For surely the Christ conception of life means, Get Something Done—something substantial and worth while and abiding.

And then, if I do not wish to suggest that we should be narrow and exclusive, neither do I wish to suggest that our text this evening is a protest against genuine BUS-INESS. "As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone."

It is not Industry, it is not Action, it is not Ambition, it is not Push that is reprehended in this prophet's para-

ble. What *is* reprehended is desultoriness and fidgetiness of action.

It is not, so to speak, the steady flow of the river that is deprecated; but the erratic running hither and thither of the quicksilver. The river flows within bounds, and with a sure aim and purpose. The quicksilver is of little use until it is confined and kept within bounds. It requires to be concentrated.

You often hear people say, when they are asked to do this or that, "O, I cannot: I am too busy." The truth being, in about nine cases out of ten, that the people who say so are under an unfortunate delusion. They are "too busy"—yes—in the sense that their attentions and energies are hopelessly *scattered*: they are *not* "too busy" in the sense of having their attentions and energies too closely centered on one or two things that are worth while. If they were less scatteredly "busy" and more succinctly "busy," they would have more time to give to the "things that are more excellent."

Oh, my friends, how much we need the adroit and solemn hint of this little Old Testament saying, in these very days of ours and in this very land. I need it. You need it. The vast majority of the American people, if I mistake not, need it badly.

We are allowing too many distractions in our lives. We have too many side-tracks to our main track. We are not concentrating sufficiently on the BIG THINGS. We are for ever "busy here and there," instead of keeping eye and mind on our *charge*. And, year after year, when the sizing-up times come round, we ask ourselves, with a bewildered disappointment, "What, after all, have we gotten

DONE during the year that is past?"

Just yesterday I came across a most wholesome article in 'The Continent' (one of our best religious weeklies in America). The article is entitled 'Finding one's own task.' Here are some of the opening sentences,—“This is the day of breadth—and thinness. Never before were so many persons interested in so many different subjects. The “well-rounded” man's life is often a disk rather than a sphere. His circumference is too great for his substance. He is obliged to read many books, in order to keep up with the times; and consequently he is not the master of any. A score of social reforms demand his allegiance—and none of them gets his real service. Cosmopolitan and modern the alert man of today assuredly is; but we are not quite so certain about his effectiveness.” Then the writer concludes his article by saying that “every Christian should make sure that he has some one particular task that he is going to do regularly, rain or shine,” and so on.

And that, my friends, is pretty much what I wish to be at tonight: let the circumference of our life—the circumference of our interests—be a little smaller, and let the substance be somewhat more solid and more reliable. In Church work particularly, I should say, let us find our proper tasks: then let us get down to our tasks, and stick to business. “Patient continuance in well-doing” is one of the great needs of the age,—in the Church and out of it.

Undoubtedly we are the losers by *preventible distractions*. Yes, in many cases (not always, by any means, but in many cases) the distractions *are preventible*. They could be prevented, many times, if we would learn to say

'No,' or if we would just exercise a little self-denial in this direction and in that, and so forth.

The whole matter resolves itself into an APPRECIATION of VALUES.

For example, do we sufficiently appreciate the value of little things? say, little portions of TIME?

It was W. E. Channing who said, "A single hour in the day, steadily given to the study of some interesting subject, brings unexpected accumulations of knowledge." A few years ago, I may tell you, I made up my mind to read through the thirty-seven Plays of Shakespeare in as many weeks,—without, if possible, 'taking' the time from anything else. I did it. One Play a week: in other words, One Act each day—Monday to Friday, and just about an average of twenty-five minutes to each Act. Of course I did not study the Plays minutely; but I read deliberately every word, and read more than once some of the more impressive passages: and I seemed to have time for everything else as usual. It was a most enriching experience: and I am doing it again this winter. It is simply marvellous how much can be done in a little time by concentrating.

By reading Three Chapters a day, or One Book a week, you will read the whole Bible through in a trifle over a year,—at an average expenditure of time of not more than fifteen minutes a day. But we are so "busy here and there" that we 'haven't time' for such achievements. O, my friends, if there is one thing I try to say as seldom as possible, it is "I haven't time." Because so often when that is said by people, it is just nonsense—based upon a pitiable

delusion. Why! in most instances we may *have* time if we will *make* time. We should always have time for the large and lustrous things of life,—the “things that are more excellent.” . . . And, if some persons really *have no time* for soul-culture, because their work-hours—in store or elsewhere—are ridiculously long, then there is something wrong somewhere. It is simply *not right* to ask anyone to work at the same narrow job from eight o'clock in the morning till nine or ten at night; no matter what wages he is offered. It is not a question of wages: it is a question of human right and human need, a question of mental and spiritual opportunity.

Then, do we sufficiently appreciate the value of PUNCTUALITY and ORDERLINESS?

Many a man who might have done big things in this world has remained a mediocrity, because of his unpunctuality. Again and again he has been “too late” to “take occasion by the hand.”

Besides, unpunctuality is a sort of social sin. There is nothing that so throws a whole company of people out of the full enjoyment of some hour of instruction or some hour of pleasure. Shakespeare makes one of his characters say, “I’ll rather be unmannerly than troublesome.” But the truth is that, in most instances, the individual who is unpunctual without apology is both “unmannerly” *and* “troublesome.”

So that both from a selfish point of view and from an unselfish point of view, the maxim holds, “Be scrupulously punctual.” And in these days of a multitude of interests and a multitude of engagements, Orderliness is well worth cultivating. You remember how an Old

Testament prophet says in one place, "In quietness and in confidence shall be your strength." Yes, for mental clarity and uplift, and for the soul's good, we need much of "quietness and confidence." Well, a man who led a very active and closely packed life once said that he managed to "preserve a certain quietness of mind" among all his multifarious engagements, because (he said) "I take up one thing in order after another," and "I try to fix my whole thoughts upon the one thing that lies before me, as if I had nothing else to attend to." Ah, if we could manage that sort of thing, what a blessing it would be to us: not only in the daily round, but also in Prayer, and in Hours of Christian Worship, and in our times of holding communion with the Master Spirits of Humanity in the great Books of the ages! Yes, indeed, "a certain quietness of mind" is necessary to the most successful and abiding work, and to the most devout and life-fashioning worship.

And is *that* not one of the chief values of our Sabbath Rest and Sabbath Opportunity?—one of the chief values of our 'assembling ourselves together' in Christian fellowship and prayer?—that we get time to cultivate "quietness of mind," to bring order again out of confusion and to bring peace where there was so much of turmoil. Thank God for the Gift of the REST DAY, when our SOULS get a chance.

"Thou art a port protected

"From storms that round us rise."

Now, brethren, I feel that I am only managing to touch the fringe of this subject tonight. It is a subject

that is both wide and deep; and I might say ever so much more. But I am going to close with but one other thought.

“And as thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone.” There is one great and blessed Experience of life—One Sublime Friendship—which many men and women are *missing* because they are so “busy here and there,”—because they never stop to think and feel and to receive God’s Best. Time and again JESUS comes and stands by us, and waits: but we are so occupied with the “*things*” of this world, that He has to pass on. We are “busy here and there,” and ‘He is gone.’ There HE stands,—the Good and Gentle and Gracious and Grand CHRIST. He might shout and hammer at us, until we simply *had* to stop our petty and greedy bus-i-ness. But that is not His way. He is too courteous for that—too gentlemanly. Besides, He does not wish to be where He is not wanted. None the less, He is eager—indescribably eager—to make His abode with us.

There HE stands,—the Good and Gentle and Gracious and Grand CHRIST! “Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by? O, surely we are not too “busy” to consider this unique offer of Friendship.

XIII

HINDERERS

"Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep Thy precepts."—PSALM CXIX, 134.

“O HOW I love Thy law!” Such is the chief and continuing theme of this long Psalm: the love of God’s will and of God’s ways.

Clearly, therefore, the Psalmist cannot mean in this verse, that he will *not* ‘keep God’s precepts’ unless he is ‘delivered from the oppression of man.’ He will ‘keep God’s precepts’ anyway. But he wants to keep them well. He wants to “run the way of God’s commandments,” as he says elsewhere. Consequently he is anxious that all handicaps and hindrances be removed,—especially all such discouragements and thwartings and stumbling-blocks as are being put in his way from time to time by one and another of his fellow-mortals. “Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep Thy precepts.”

O yes, we may be willing, and we may have sincerity and pluck enough, to serve God in “bonds and afflictions” (to use St. Paul’s phrase). We may be determined to be true to our best selves in face of human interference and human opposition—of whatever sort. But, as these things are discouragements and drags, we should like, if it be possible, to have them removed; so that our pace may be a little swifter and our breathing a little freer. “Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep Thy

precepts."

There are various kinds of *hindrances* to our 'keeping God's precepts' well,—to our keeping them regularly and surely and with alacrity.

Why is it that so many people are not nearly so good as they might be; not nearly so good as they desire and aspire to be—many of them? Why is it that so many really religious people are weak on the side of practical righteousness and usefulness of life? Why is it that so many professing disciples of Christ (true enough at heart, many of them) are showing themselves petulant and irritable, and too easily giving way to impulse, and apparently indifferent and hang-back in the work of the Kingdom?

Why is it? Chiefly because of the *hindrances*, because of the stumbling-blocks (or "offences," as the New Testament calls them) which lie in their way, and which distract their attention and give them many a nasty jar, and are like to take the heart out of them.

Now the *hindrances* are of various kinds.

Some of them are within ourselves. To many people ill-health is a hindrance, and accounts for not a little moral vacillation and moral failure. Then some people seem to have been born with certain twists of temperament, which make it almost impossible for them, in their own strength, to rise to the serene heights of Christian cheerfulness and Christian charity. Others, again, are the victims of inordinate and unlovely appetites, which seduce them from following after "whatsoever things are pure" and "whatsoever things are lovely." And there are the demons of pride and self-complacency and stubbornness and niggardliness, and the whole bad brood,

—spectres and snares *within* ourselves.

But there are also external hindrances,—thwartings and stumbling-blocks outwith ourselves. Climatic conditions, for example, may explain, to some extent, the moral and spiritual tone of a community. The sanitary condition—and the hygienic conditions generally—of a district may, to a large extent, account for God's 'precepts' not being 'kept' there. Even the proper lighting of a city's streets by night has been shown, in some instances, to have improved the morals of the place. And then, there are the various "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune" (as Shakespeare phrases it): business reverses; financial embarrassments; the sicknesses and hurts and depressions of our dear ones,—wounding our spirits as well as theirs; and the grim visits of Death,—cutting off from us, sometimes, the most helpful and uplifting of our Companions of the Way. These all—spectres and snares *outside* of ourselves: determined and brought to pass, for the most part, by our environment and by the play of Circumstance.

But, brethren, of the outward hindrances to moral and spiritual progress the worst, by a long way, are those which come from what the Psalmist here comprehensively calls "the oppression of man,"—the various thoughtlessnesses and follies and selfishnesses and wickednesses of our fellow-mortals: deliberate or otherwise: expressly directed against us, or—at least—whose mischievous impact we are bound to feel. "Deliver me from the *oppression of man*: so will I keep Thy precepts."

Unfortunately (yet, perhaps, fortunately—for our encouragement) Scripture has to take frank account of this

type of hindrance to achievement in righteousness. In this Book of Psalms, for instance, (this incomparable Book of the Soul) you have such sayings as these:—"O God, the proud are risen up against me;" "Let them be ashamed and confounded together that seek after my soul to destroy it;" "He remembered not to show mercy, but persecuted the poor and needy man, that he might even slay the broken in heart;" "Our soul is exceedingly filled with the scorning of those that are at ease, and with the contempt of the proud;" "Hide me from the secret counsel of the wicked; from the insurrection of the workers of iniquity: who whet their tongue like a sword, and bend their bows to shoot their arrows—even bitter words." Then you remember how, in one place, Paul asks to be delivered from "unreasonable and wicked men." And could anything be more solemn, could anything be more scathing,—(and you may be sure it was only said because it needed to be said: and it needs to be said still)—could anything be more awfully solemn than our Saviour's words, "It is impossible but that offences (hindrances) will come: but woe unto him through whom they come! It were better for him that a millstone were hanged about his neck, and he cast into the sea"!

Well, my friends, this moral and spiritual discouragement which arises from "the oppression of man" is the very worst kind of hindrance which ever gets in our way. And that, because it is so wholly out of harmony with the human function.

"Life," it has been said, "is either a neighborhood or a jungle." That is to say, either a neighborhood,—where all is peace and kindness and mutual helpfulness; or a

jungle,—where all is ferocity and greed and rapine and bloodshed. Well, clearly, life is not meant to be a jungle: it is meant to be a neighborhood. “For none of us liveth to himself,” says the New Testament; and again, “Bear ye one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ.” Yes, we are “born to do benefits:” to help one another, not to hinder and harass one another: not to perplex and poison and plunder one another, but to “dwell together in unity:” ‘considering one another, and provoking unto love and to good works,’—as neighbors, as brothers and sisters in the One Family of God. And so “the oppression of man,” preventing this neighborhood-way-of-life and suggesting and encouraging the jungle-way-of-life, is simply awful; because it is so horribly out of tune with God’s purposes for Humanity. . . .

Suppose we ask, then,—in order to be on our guard, and in order to avoid them or at least to know how to deal with them,—(suppose we ask), what forms does “the oppression of man” assume?

Sometimes it assumes a Corporate form,—organized, systematic, armed cap-a-pie.

The Liquor Traffic, for example, and the White-Slave Traffic, as exploited in this and some other countries, are corporate forms of “the oppression of man” which are preventing thousands of souls from ‘keeping God’s precepts.’ They are working fearful havoc. And they are doubly and trebly damaging, just because they are *so* ‘oppressive,’ so domineering, so tyrannical, so difficult for people to get-out-of-the-clutches-of, once they are in.

Then there is the inadequate wage system. We do not

require to read Winston Churchill's "The Inside of the Cup," in order to see how "the oppression of man" hinders in this direction. Truth, here, is stranger than fiction: or at least more staggering. I have seen it stated that there are women in the 'Little Italy's of New York City, for example, who get fifteen cents apiece for artificial bouquets which sell in the shops for about a dollar-and-a-half apiece; their total earnings being from sixty to, seventy cents a day. Now sometimes low wages and high morals *do* go together; but it is only a double portion of the grace of God which can bring that to pass. Humanly speaking, if you are starving men's bodies, you are starving their souls also; and the human being's proficiency-in-morals depends to a considerable extent upon the human being's pay.

Then there are our arbitrary class distinctions and the unnatural and unbrotherly gap which too often exists between employers and employed. True, these things are not so unpleasantly obvious in this Country as in, say, the older countries of Europe; but, let me tell you, they are growing, I fear, in this Country, instead of diminishing and disappearing. In a recent book—called "Immigrant Forces"—it is told that "a young Bohemian woman, having saved a tidy sum from her earnings as a maid in America, returned to her home in Prague with the idea of settling down there to work. It was scarcely two months before she was on her way back to America. The reason she gave was not solely the better wages she would receive. She said, 'Here (i. e., in her European home) I work like a dog and am treated like a dog. In America I work hard, but my mistress is kind and considerate, and

evidently thinks I am a human being, too. . . . I am going back to America, and I do not think I shall ever return.' ” Long may it be said, indeed, of this Country that its employers treat their employes like ‘human beings,’ and not like ‘dogs’ or machines! . . . Yet, what is to be said, when young people are asked to work in stores from eight o’clock in the morning to nine or ten at night—six full days a week. Is that fair? Is it not just “the oppression of man” preventing our young people having sufficient leisure to realize themselves along certain lines of the Divine “precepts?” Some improvement, there, is needed in our own community. . . .

But, besides in the corporate form, “the oppression of man” is to be experienced in Individual forms and instances—every day and all over the world.

“Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep Thy precepts.” O yes, how often we are inclined to say, If people would just leave us alone, or at least treat us in a half-Christlike fashion, we could make some progress in character-culture! But, alas, (as the Prayer Book phrases it) we are “sore let and hindered” one way and another almost every day: and, for the most part, we are—every one of us—both hindered and hinderers.

Sometimes it is through Lack of Courtesy that we ‘oppress’ and hinder our fellows from ‘keeping God’s precepts’ proficiently and cheerfully. And, remember, Courtesy is not just a matter of taste and temperament: it is an express Gospel Rule. “Be courteous,” says St. Peter in his 1st Epistle. In my parish in Scotland, when, Sunday mornings, I walked from the Manse to the Church, I

usually met the minister of one of the other Churches in town coming in the opposite direction. One morning, it was the new minister of that Church passing along to take his first service there. I had never met him before, but I guessed who he was, and gave him "Good Morning" in the passing. Some weeks afterwards, at the close of his Installation Service, he said to me, "Man, you have no idea how much uplift I got from your 'Good Morning' that first day we met out here: I was feeling blue and discouraged and apprehensive, but your two words lifted the cloud." Now, I tell you that, my friends, not to praise myself (God forbid!—besides, I have never flattered myself on being an expert in courtesy). I tell it you to show you how much good cheer we can be the means of communicating, by just being cheerfully frank and kindly to our fellow-men—whether they happen to be life-long chums or not.

Sometimes, again, it is through Lack of Neighborly Imagination that we 'oppress' and hinder. And by Neighborly Imagination I mean the faculty of putting ourselves in other people's places—so as to do as we would be done by. O, how often we say things we would never dream of saying, how often we judge people as we would never presume to judge them, with what deplorable want of sense we sometimes act towards people,—simply because we do not try to put our souls in their soul's places and to imagine ourselves in their precise circumstances! And so misunderstandings arise, and feelings are hurt, and the little "rifts" are made (and sometimes big rifts) in the 'lutes' of life's orchestra. . . . To help us avoid all such, then, let us ponder these two Apostolic sayings:

"Look not every man on his own things only, but every man also on the things of others," and, "Considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted."

Sometimes, again, it is by Tale-bearing that we 'oppress' and hinder. If you will read the old Book of Leviticus, which is much more scientific and much more modern than some people suppose, you will find this Law amongst others, "Thou shalt not go up and down as a tale-bearer among thy people." And the New Testament has some slashing things to say of those who are "whisperers." O yes, too often we allow ourselves to 'take up a reproach against a neighbor' (as the XVth Psalm puts it),—to 'take it up,' to accept it and handle it—so to speak, and to 'whisper' it about amongst our intimates and associates,—until we have hurt and damaged the said 'neighbor.' Then, the chances are—such is human nature—said neighbor will proceed to live *down* to the new reputation we have created for him by our "tale-bearing." How diametrically and wickedly opposed to the Spirit of Christ: the spirit of forgiveness and forbearance and mutual helpfulness and encouragement-in-the-way-of-righteousness!

Once more, it is sometimes by the process of what is often called "pin-pricking" that we 'oppress' and hinder men and women from 'keeping God's precepts' well and gladly.

You know what this "pin-pricking" is: not slashing at people on a frank and generous scale,—but just nagging at them whenever one gets a chance, and humiliating them whenever one gets the opportunity, and making subtle insinuations in their presence—while pretending to speak generalities and perhaps dropping them an anonymous let-

ter now and again. My friends, many a good soul has been ruined by that sort of thing,—has let go its hold of faith in God and faith in Humanity, and has become sceptical and sour and unutterably hard and selfish. Well did the Master say, “Woe to that man by whom the offence cometh!”

“Deliver me from the oppression of man: so will I keep Thy precepts.”

Ay, some individuals are suffering grievously from “the oppression of man,”—not to speak of the oppression of woman; and the wonder is, sometimes, that such ‘oppressed’ humans can even live up to the level of Christian mediocrity,—not to mention, for a moment, Christian Saintship.

Which of us is wholly guiltless? Which of us does *not* need to get down on our knees and pray for more and more of the Spirit of CHRIST; so that our hearts may be chastened into a new appreciation and love of our fellow-mortals; and so that we may know how to adopt really CHRISTIAN METHODS,—in the home, in the store, in the factory, in the Church, and in all the comings and goings of our Communal Life?

“Even so, come, Lord Jesus” into our hard and thoughtless and unloving hearts, and make them Human Hearts and Hearts of Love!

XIV

THE HAPPINESS OF HOLDING ON

"Behold, we count them happy which endure."—JAMES
V, 11.

THERE are, one may say, three E's which go to make up a complete life, and, in particular, a complete and effective Christian manhood or womanhood. They are Enthusiasm, Energy, and Endurance. Enthusiasm, alone, is not nearly enough: besides, we cannot always be burning and boiling with Enthusiasm. Neither is Enthusiasm-plus-Energy enough: our Energy does not always energize equally,—from this cause and from that we relax and tire. But add to Enthusiasm and Energy ENDURANCE; and you have a pretty satisfactory equipment. Yes, we need to be able to bear, when we cannot actually do. We need to be able to hold-on, when we cannot actually be pushing-on and making progress. And, "Behold, we count them happy which endure"—We call them blessed who endure.

You remember a remarkable passage at the close of the Fortieth of Isaiah, "They that wait upon the Lord . . . shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint." First, the wings of aspiration and Enthusiasm; then, the brisk Energy of the fleet foot; then, the solid Endurance of the walking pace, when one is like to faint, but does not. From soaring on wings to running,

and then to walking! Does it seem a disappointing anticlimax? In reality it is not so. It is a going from strength to strength. "Behold, we count them happy which endure." The happiness of holding-on: the blessedness of bearing-up.

When you think of it, my friends, what we honor and admire most about GOD Himself is the Enduringness—the Abidingness—of His qualities. His power abides. His wisdom abides. His love abides. The constancy of our Father in heaven—His sublime staying-power—impresses us, and touches us. We know how it is put in Scripture here—in various passages. "The glory of the Lord shall endure for ever:" "His righteousness endureth for ever:" "His truth endureth to all generations:" "His mercy endureth for ever:" and, in this same epistle, God is called the "Father of lights, with whom is no variability, neither shadow of turning."

Then, do we not rejoice and glory in the fact that "JESUS CHRIST is the same yesterday, and today, and forever?"— His purity never to be tarnished; His love never to be wearied; the comfort of His Cross never to be robbed of one iota of its content; the 'power of His endless life' never to be diminished by one jot or tittle:—holding on for ever in the supremacy of His place, in the sublimity of His character, in the sweetness of His grace.

Yes, as James Russell Lowell says, in one of his poems,
"Endurance is the crowning quality."

What is it that constitutes the difference between the greater works of art and the lesser, between the greater

things in literature and the lesser? Is it not just this quality of ENDURANCE? "With tears and laughter for all time," says Mrs. Browning of Shakespeare. And that is the distinction of the great Books and the great Pictures and the great Musical Compositions. They are "for all time." They live: never out of date: receiving, in fact, new content and new power-of-inspiration with each new generation of seeing eyes and hearing ears and thinking minds and understanding hearts.

We are not surprised, then, that the Bible is strong on the need and the distinction of Endurance.

Enthusiasm? By all means: life is lustreless without enthusiasm. Energy? Most certainly: life is flabby without energy. But through all, my friends, Endurance,—Staying-Power,—Stick-to-itiveness.

Moses, we are told, was neither seduced by pleasure nor overcome of fear, because "he endured as seeing Him Who is invisible." Yes it is seeing with the eye of Faith what the eye of flesh cannot see that makes men and women *hold-on*. "Can thine heart endure?" said the prophet Ezekiel to the people of Jerusalem, when he was telling them that there were dark days ahead for them. And you remember how our Saviour frankly and seriously urged His disciples to 'count the cost' of Christian discipleship, and how He said, "He that endureth to the end shall be saved."

O, my friends, there is so much of grace and geniality about the Gospel, there is so much of gladness in true Christian discipleship, that we are apt sometimes to forget the grim conditions of unqualified and ultimate success.

And yet in a wonderfully deft way our text this morn-

ing brings the gladness and the grimness together: "We count them HAPPY which ENDURE."—The Happiness of Holding-on.

Holding-on—Enduring—"Patient Continuance in well-doing" (to use a phrase of St. Paul)! Oh, how much we need it, all of us!

Not, perhaps, a particularly brilliant note of character. No, perhaps not a brilliant thing; but a thing that counts,—ay, *the* thing that counts.

"There are only two creatures," says an old Eastern proverb, (there are only two creatures) that can surmount the pyramids unaided,—the eagle and the snail." And so, if, for Christian expansion and Christian progress, we need the soaring faculty that is typified in the king of birds; we need also the ability to GO SLOW, and feel our way along, and stick to the track in those slippery places where a freer and swifter foot might slip and bring the traveller to grief.

I knew a young athlete at the University of Edinburgh who could beat all comers at quick starting in a short race. He was off his mark like the very shot of the pistol itself,—and with it to a tenth of a second; and at, say, twenty yards from the starting-line he was invariably leading. Now, it is often said of a short race (a sprint) that 'everything is in the start.' Is it? I never knew that fellow to win a race—even a hundred yards race. Why? Because he never took pains to cultivate *staying-power*. Always first at the start, he was never first at the finish.

. . . And if the importance of staying-power increases with the length of the race, then let us remember

that our lives are not just sprints, but long and exacting races requiring "all we know."

The Start may be something (yes, a right start, surely): but the Staying Power is nearly everything. "Which of you," said the great Teacher, you remember, "which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply all that behold begin to mock . . ., saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish." What an awful pronouncement to have to receive on one's life,—“This man began to build, but was not able to finish”!

I knew a preacher, too, who was always announcing series of lectures to be given in his Church—on this and that subject. They looked remarkably well on paper—these programs; but I do not remember of any one series being carried out to completion. They (all, I think) died premature deaths. Why? Because (and I had this on the admission of the man himself) he had not mapped out his course with sufficient precision: he had not gotten his material sufficiently well together at the start; and, once started, he seemed to think that comparatively little work was needed.

Why, brethren, if a man once starts on a worthy and substantial line of work (whatever it may be), let him know that he is in for a call-to-work which will *abide* from day to day and week to week. I sometimes fear that some of our young people allow themselves to suppose that, after four or five years at College, they will be equipped and the way thereafter will be comparatively easy. Why, my young friends, after a fellow leaves col-

lege (if it be that), his WORK is only beginning. And, if a fellow does not learn, at College, to *endure*—to hang-in to whatever work he undertakes, then, I suspect, his college education has gone for little.

Then there is the "Gusher:" the individual who effervesces with enthusiasm over this or that project, and is prolific in promises and suggestions; but, somehow or other, not on deck when wanted, *not there* to take part in the follow-up work,—usually elsewhere and otherwise occupied when the need of quiet, patient, continuation-work is pressing. Probably always "busy here and there" (as the Old Testament phrases it), but seldom 'on *the* job.' Ay, not infrequently too much gush, too little grit. "He was ever precise in promise-keeping," is approvingly said of one of Shakespeare's men.

Yes, it is the explanation of many a disappointing life,—this lack of Endurance, this lack of stick-to-itiveness. Many a man has relaxed just at the point where success was about to begin. I trust I do not underrate the difficulties one may meet; the cloying monotony of some tasks; the baffling discouragements that fall in one's way; the trials of faith and patience; the subtle temptations to ease, and the specious excuses that bow themselves into our pathway. But, brethren, if these things were *not*, there would be no call for staying-power, no happiness of endurance.

"Much drawback! What were earth without?

"Is this our ultimate stage, or starting-place

"To try man's foot . . . ?

" . . . Was the trial sore?

"Temptation sharp? Thank God . . . !

"Why comes temptation but for man to meet

"And master and make crouch beneath his foot,

"And *so* be pedestaled in triumph?"

Ah, yes, the call to Endurance is not just a counsel of despair. It is an appeal to all that is most heroic and most courageous and most Christlike in human nature. "Behold, we count them **HAPPY** who **ENDURE**."

All the same, we do well to make up our minds that there are times when there is not much exhilaration—not much suggestion of 'happiness'—about the Endurance.

There are times, with most of us,—are there not?—when things go all awry, when all is confusion, when there is no glint of light—no beam of hope—athwart the path, when we are simply humbled flat; when, perhaps, our faith in God is a mere flicker, and our love of Christ a scarce distinguishable spark; when we are out of heart with ourselves, and have pretty near lost faith in everybody else. What are we to do at such times as these? Simply **HOLD ON**: set our faces like a flint, and 'march breast forward.' No dazzling feat is possible in such dull, flat, *uninspirational* seasons. No dazzling feat is possible: no thrilling throw of the soul: no exhilarating 'poetry of motion'! Just the prosaic and lustreless duty of going on step by step—with "quiet brave endurance." It was a man of many sceptical and despondent thoughts who said, nevertheless, "Be what you ought to be; the rest is God's affair. . . . And," he added, "supposing that there were no good and holy God, . . . Duty would still be the key of the enigma, the pole-star of a wandering humanity." And

there is a wonderful passage in the Book of Job (that Book so sombre in many ways, but, at heart and in its issue, a Book of Faith)—there is this wonderful passage, "He hath made me a byword of the people; . . . mine eye also is dim by reason of sorrow, and all my members are as a shadow. . . . Yet shall the righteous HOLD 'ON HIS WAY, and he that hath clean hands shall wax stronger and stronger."

Yes, my friends, it is in the day of hard trial that Endurance is the only way; and the only guarantee of 'happiness;' and, moreover, the only thing that we 'count happy' and agree to admire and honor. "In a fair gale," it has been said, "every fool may sail, but wise behavior in a *storm* commends the wisdom of a pilot." Or, as the Book of Proverbs has it, "If thou faint in the day of adversity, thy strength is small."

"We count *them* happy which endure!" Is it not so? The individual who clean breaks down "in the day of adversity," and lies shattered and hopeless and bereft of all energy and all desire? Or, the individual who, "in the day of adversity," frets and fumes and cavils and snarls at Providence? Or, the individual who proceeds to engulf his cares instead of enduring them—who proceeds to 'drown his cares' in some sort of self-indulgence? These (however we may feel for them, and appreciate the hardness of their lot)—these are *not* the men and women whom we 'count happy' and take for our models. No, "we count them happy who *endure*:" who, in their darkest days and in their bitterest experiences, still keep on trusting, and keep on trying, and keep on smiling (if it may be),—determined, at all events, to

touch no other heart with pain, and to infect no neighbour soul with doubt, and to bring into the lives about them no other spirit than the very Spirit of CHRIST Himself. Thank God for *that* sort. I have known not a few of them; and they have been the sheet-anchor of my own Faith and Patience when these things were like to give way. For

“Through *such* souls . . .

“God stooping shows sufficient of His light

“For us in the dark to rise by.”

And so, brethren, I have come to my last word this morning. “Through such souls”—have I just quoted? Yes, but “ONE there is above all others,” Who shows us *how* to “endure.” “Consider HIM Who endured such contradiction of sinners against Himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.”

Long weeks before the end the Saviour “steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem,”—where, He well knew, suspicion and disloyalty and insult and death awaited Him. He “steadfastly *set His face* to go”: *and went*. Never a hint of flinching: never a suggestion of turning out of the way.

Then, in what I always think must have been His very darkest and most painful hour, it was, “Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me: nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.”

Then, in fine, He “endured the cross;” because, if it was the death-place of Sin, it was also the birth-place of a new Love for the world and a new Faith in the Goodness and Mercy of God and a new spring for the Ser-

vice of Humanity.

And, *how* was it all done? With a frown on the face, and a protest in the heart? Nay, verily: but with an unfaltering trust in God, and with a quiet mind, and with a heart of Love. And so the JOY of the Saviour—in His completed work of Redemption—must be a deeper and richer and holier joy than *we* have ever attained to: although, mark you, we may have some taste of it, if we take up our crosses quietly and bravely and hopefully and lovingly—for HIS sake and for the Brethren's sake and for the joy that is set before us! For, "behold, we count them *happy* who endure."

XV

THE DIVINE ARITHMETIC

"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."—PSALM XC, 12.

MANY fine and appreciative things have been said about this Psalm which I have read to you this evening, and in the heart of which I have found my text. It has been called "perhaps the most sublime of human compositions." "The Psalm," says another, "has something uncommonly striking, solemn, sinking into the depths of the Godhead." And so on—tributes exceeding many.

And no wonder! For the XCth Psalm is wonderful,—a masterpiece,—a literary "pearl of great price,"—a unique poem of the Soul.

Nothing more apt, nor more pathetic, than is said here has ever been said about the brevity of human life—the comparative nothingness of it all. At the same time nothing more apt, nor more majestic, than what is said here has ever been said about the things that abide,—about the Unchanging God and the consequent splendor of human life when touched with "the beauty of the Lord our God."

It is one of those portions of Scripture that we should all be the better of knowing by heart. The XCth Psalm has had its place, all these years, in the Burial Service of "The Book of Common Prayer;" and it is the foundation of Isaac Watts's well-known hymn "Our God, our Help

in ages past."

A modern American poet, speaking of the Old Testament, said, in a letter to a friend, "Am still wondering about that Book. Look at 'Job' now—it is amazing—one or two thousand years before our era." Perhaps he was a little out in his reckoning of the time of the composition of the Book of 'Job;' but he was certainly right in saying, "It is amazing." Similarly *we* may say of the Old Testament, "Still wondering about that Book. Look at the XCth Psalm now—it is amazing." Yes, indeed, "it is amazing;" and, "as the greatest only are, in its simplicity sublime."

We are not to suppose, however, that, with its intense solemnity and with its peculiar appropriateness for the Burial Service, this Psalm is a poem of Death. On the contrary, it is, in very deed, a poem of Life. And so, it seems to me, the practical value of the Psalm is focussed for us in the words of our text,—*"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."*

We may fairly put the emphasis on the little word "so;"— *"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."* . . .

"That we may apply our hearts unto wisdom." Not, that we may increase our stock of common knowledge. Not, that we may increase our smart sententiousness. Not, that we may become more worldly wise. But,—*"that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom,"* that we may increase our heart-wisdom: which is the best kind of wisdom of all, and which the New Testament calls *"the wisdom that is from above, . . . first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be entreated, full of mercy and good fruits,*

without partiality, and without hypocrisy.”

How, then, is that end to be attained,—namely a safe and substantial garnering of Heart-Wisdom?— “So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.” What are to be some of the methods of this “divine arithmetic”?

Well, first of all I will say—but let me not be misunderstood—that we are not to “number our days” at all. I mean, we are not to be either painfully precise or morbidly melancholy about ‘numbering our days.’ It has been said that “nature hates calculators,” and that “all good conversation, manners, and action, come from a spontaneity which . . . makes the moment great.” In other words, brethren, if we are to live naturally, spontaneously, gladly, inspirationally,—we must largely get rid of the ‘calculating’ habit, and move along as if each new day were both our first and our last day, and our best day. We must pluck out the heart of each new day’s blessing, without stopping every hour or so to say within ourselves, ‘We have lived so long, and have only so much longer to live.’ *That*, it seems to me, is really the thought lying back of such a saying of Jesus as “Take no thought for the morrow.” He surely doesn’t mean that we are to be thoughtless and improvident and unprepared. But He surely does mean that we are not to becloud our days with dull forebodings, that we are not to take the spring and sparkle out of our lives by a morbid balancing of probabilities. I wish I could express what I mean-to-be at a little more clearly. For what I feel is that some

people have not yet learned to take hold of life with both hands and to live naturally—brightly and bravely and as if they had a right to live. They are calculating too much. They are going in too much for comparing one day with another. They are moralising too much, and allowing the shadows of the past and the spectres of the future to take the heart out of them for the opportunities and the blessings which are their present right. When shall we learn the goodness and the glory of the Apostolic saying, “*Now is the accepted time*”?

But, apparently, there is a ‘wise’ numbering of our days.

And so I will say, next, Let us “number our days” *spiritually*, not mathematically.

For some things, to be sure, it is important to know a person’s exact age. Nay more, in some respects one’s age-in-years has a good deal to do with one’s mental and spiritual attainments: according to the remark, “Tell me how old you are, and I will tell you what you are thinking.”

But, after all, brethren, as one of the greatest prophets of the Soul has put it, “It is not length of life, but depth of life” that counts: “It is not duration, but a taking of the soul out of time, as all high action of the mind does: when we are living in the sentiments we ask no questions about time.”

What avails it that a fellow is young in years and in appearance, if he is old in duplicity and vice? Or, what matters it that one is mature in years and in the wisdom of the world, if he is green and immature in that “meek-

ness and gentleness of Christ" which the years should bring? Not seldom those who—to our uncommon grief—have died in their prime have gotten far more out of life, and have put far more into life, than scores of those who have made out the allotted span. And one man does more that is really-worth-while in a single day than his neighbor does in years. So true is it that "life is measured by thought and action, not by time;" and that

"We live in deeds, not years; in thoughts, not breaths;
In feelings, not in figures on a dial.

We should count time by heart-throbs. He most lives
Who thinks most, feels the noblest, acts the best."

Doesn't our Psalm here say, "Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us?"— Neither the beauty of unblemished youth, nor the beauty of well-preserved age; but "the beauty of the Lord our God,"—"the beauty of holiness,"—the beauty that "time cannot age" and "death cannot slay." And do we not read in one of the New Testament Epistles that "with the Lord" (that is, from the spiritual point of view, from the point of view of what is really worth caring about)—"with the Lord" one day may be as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day? O, so many people have yet to be emancipated from the merely chronological estimate of life! "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

And I will say, next, Let us "number our days" *economically*, not prodigally.

Do you say, Now you are at the very opposite pole from the point of view you have just been emphasizing? Yes,

I am: and purposely. Because it is so easy, in the affairs of the soul, to mistake license for liberty, and to go beyond bounds. It is so easy, in seeking to be spiritually-minded, to get away up beyond the atmosphere altogether into a realm that is insubstantial and ineffectual. But, as the Apostle says, "*the life which I now live in the flesh* I live by the faith of the Son of God;" and we have to take account of certain conditions and limitations. While it is true that we are children of Eternity, it is also true that we are creatures of a Day; and we need to know what to do with each single day. The artists, you know, have usually painted the Hours with wings; because they fly fully oftener than they creep. Truly, "the time is short." Yes, too short for trifling. Too short—far too short—for feeding our jealousies and nursing our grudges. Too short—far too short—for aimless (but never harmless) gossip. Too short—far too short—for haphazard methods of work. Not that we are to make of life a feverish rush: for "he that believeth shall not make haste," and all good work requires a certain leisureliness. Nor that we are to be the slaves of a schedule—like a railroad train: for "where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty," and all great work should wear an air of freedom. Only, we ought to know the value of Time; and how to "use" it, "as not abusing it." Many a man's success is attributable to nothing more nor less than that he "has learnt the secret of economizing his time,"—that he has studied to be punctual, and to be orderly, and to "gather up the fragments" of his time instead of leaving them to waste. "So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wis-

dom."

And I will say, next, Let us, "number our days" gratefully.

How apt we are to remember the dull and rainy days, and to forget the bright and fair days! There are depressingly few Polly Anna's among us. The truth is, we too often begin at the wrong end in our calculations. We begin with the unpleasantnesses and the disappointments: and, of course, it is quite a long time ere we come to the happier things. But suppose we begin with the happier things,—the chances are we may never get the length of the other things at all. "Keep your eyes open to your mercies," says Stevenson, "the man that forgets to be thankful has fallen asleep in life."

I trust I am not thoughtless, nor unsympathetic: and I think I know the trials and thwartings of the human situation pretty well. But, oh, my friends, with it all, what great days—ay, what a host of great days—most of us have had! Days of simple, unaffected happiness; the memory of which we would not trade for anything. Days of usefulness; the knowledge of which assures us that we have not lived in vain. Times and seasons of mental emancipation and spiritual uplift; the blessing of which still abides with us, and keeps us in tune with the Infinite. Times and seasons of the sweet and pure exchanges of Love and Friendship; which are making music in our hearts for all time. "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?"

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind,

Thou art not so unkind

As man's ingratitude; . . .
Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
Thou dost not bite so nigh
As benefits forgot."

My friends, there is something wrong somewhere—something wrong either with the way we have taken our joys or with the way we have taken our sorrows, or both—if we cannot say, every single soul of us, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: .

. . I will declare Thy name among my brethren; in the midst of the congregation will I praise Thee."

And, if we are to "number our days" gratefully, surely also we shall "number" them *hopefully*!

Indeed, the one follows from the other: as the CXVth Psalm has it, with an inexorable simplicity of logic, "The Lord hath been mindful of us: He will bless us."

Some of us have a fatalistic tendency of mind. We *will* take gloomy views of the days ahead. We refuse to "abound in hope." Things are going to disappoint us,—we are sure of it.

Now, my friends, I know right well just what I am talking about here; because I am one of those who have the fatalistic bias. But, I tell you (as I try to tell myself again and again), there is nothing we should fight-down and fight-out more determinedly. For I believe sufficiently in the philosophy of the New Thought to say that, if we habitually expect the days ahead to be disappointing, we are doing our best to make them so. Let us shake it off,—this apprehensiveness, this hopeless-

ness. It is not fair to ourselves. Still less is it fair to the keeping and providing God. We shall do well to get by heart—and to keep in our hearts—that great verse of Robert Browning's (so obviously inspired by the words of the Book Itself),

“Grow old along with me!

The best is yet to be,

The last of life, for which the first was made:

Our times are in His hand

Who saith, ‘A whole I planned,

Youth shows but half; trust God: see all nor be afraid!’ ”

And so, last of all and to sum up all, I will say, Let us “number our days” as *Children of Eternity*.

Not, Let us spend our days here wisely and purely and usefully; because they are few, and will soon be at an end. But, Let us spend our days here wisely and purely and usefully; that we may be ready for the more splendid opportunities and the larger tasks of “that new life, we blindly christen death.” “Our life,” it has been said, “is not a land-locked lake enclosed within the shore-lines of seventy years. It is an arm of the sea.” Let our ships be builded, then, for the “larger waters.” No small and flimsy craft will do: only “stately ships,” which are stately souls.

It is remarkable, indeed, how little JESUS says, specifically, about the Future Life. “He is never once weak or sentimental” about it: “He is very abstemious of explanation.” But, could you possibly imagine Him saying, “This life is all: we have no everlasting Father; we have no abiding Home.” Why, brethren, JESUS is

inexplicable on any such basis. His whole teaching, and His whole life and work, *assume* that "here we have no continuing city, but we seek one to come." He didn't need to *say* much about Human Immortality: He *lived* it, and graciously gave away the secret of it, and made men "wise unto salvation."

"So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom."

XVI

THE SUPERIOR BLESSEDNESS OF GIVING

"It is more blessed to give than to receive."—Acts XX,
35.

I DON'T know what you think, my friends; but there is no portion of Scripture that I like better, or that it does me more good to read, than this Farewell Address of St. Paul to the "elders of the Church" of Ephesus. It is at once so frank and so fervent; yet marked by a fine restraint. Here we have a man of high ideals and of many toils and trials sizing-himself-up (so to speak); yet without a trace of egotism. And—to be sure—the whole thing, from beginning to end, is redolent of grace, saturated with the wholesome perfume of the Gospel. No one, it seems to me, (no one) can read these words of the Christian Apostle—while keeping the circumstances well in mind—without gaining a new appreciation of the man and of his message and of his Master. No wonder we read that, after the address and the prayer which followed it (how I should have liked to hear that prayer!),—no wonder we read, then, that "they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more." Ay, there are some faces that are inspirations: because they have souls behind them.

But there is one very special point of interest in this

Miletus address of St. Paul: namely, that it preserves for us a wonderful saying of the Master Himself, which is not to be found in any of the four Gospels; although, to be sure, the spirit of it is in all of Jesus' teaching. Moreover, the saying in question is the only reported saying of Jesus in the New Testament outside of the Gospels. "I have showed you all things," says the Apostle (in verse 35 here), "how that . . . ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how He said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

Well, are we not inclined at once to say, 'How fortunate—how good—that *that* saying of the Master has been preserved for us here!' And, are we not moved to say, further, 'How many wonderful things Jesus must have said, which have not been recorded: would that we had more of them!' (for, after all, the Gospel Record is but a fragment).

Then, how like Jesus to have said *just that*, "It is more blessed to give than to receive!" He simply must have said it: it is no invention of St. Paul. Yes, there are some things which are "too good" *not* "to be true." And that is one of the distinctions of the teaching of Jesus: that it is beyond question, because it is by far the best that we know—and better by far than we ourselves could have conceived. . . .

"The words of the Lord Jesus, how HE said, It is more blessed to give than to receive."

"Stuff and nonsense," says the man of the world, "it is the other way about,—it is more blessed to receive than to give—and everybody thinks so: what we give im-

poverishes us and depresses us—less or more, while what we get—either by our own toil or in gift—enriches us and gladdens us.”

Of course, my friends, we are not surprised that the crass worldlings should think so—and say so: those down-rightly and avowedly selfish people of the ‘Iago’ type,

“Who, trimm’d in forms and visages of duty,
Keep yet their hearts attending on themselves,
. . . and when they have lined their coats
Do themselves homage.”

But, my friends, putting aside the crass worldling, there is—as distinguished from the man who is consciously and fervently “in Christ”—(there is) the ordinary man of the world who is not entirely untouched “to fine issues”: the man in the street, as it is so often put.

Well, I wish to say that *he* knows perfectly well—and is often moved to admit—that “it is more blessed to give than to receive.” That is, if he is a normally healthy human—mentally and morally.

Let me suppose he is a manufacturer; with a sufficient plant, with a number of workmen in his employ, shipping orders from time to time to various parts of the world, and receiving payment for value given. Do you mean to tell me that the only thing he thinks about are his profits, that the only thing which gives him any satisfaction at all is the return he is getting for his invested capital? I simply don’t believe it. I believe, rather, that deep down in that man’s nature (if he is a man at all—and welcomes a man’s job) there is the satisfaction of being a ‘producer,’ the satisfaction of knowing that he is

giving this busy world something that it needs—perhaps something that only his factory can turn out, the satisfaction that by his gifts of output he is counting for something in this world as God has made it. Ay, and I believe that, in many cases, *that* satisfaction is even more prized by a man than the satisfaction of ‘making good money.’ Indeed, isn’t that one chief reason why so many men who are eminently well-off are unwilling to retire from the activities of business?—they have a sort of suspicion that, when retired, they will have ceased to be producers—will have ceased to be dynamic factors in the world’s progress, no matter how much money may still continue to come in to them. They have a lurking persuasion, in short, that “it is more blessed to *give* than to receive.”

Or, take the case of a musical artist. What is “the head and front” of his pleasure—of his artistic ‘blessedness’? It is (or I am very far cheated) *giving* of his best to other people,—his best of interpretation and of uplift and of the contagion of joy. He doesn’t despise whatever fees he may get. He probably likes applause and appreciation. Moreover, he is glad of all he can get, in the way of hints and helps, from other artists. And so forth. But the ‘blessing’ of his life-work—the true happiness of it—the thing that really pays about it all is what he ‘gives’ (his best) and how he gives it (in the best way he can). To be always getting, getting, getting is only to exist: but giving means living. As a hymn-writer of the eighteenth century has put it,

“That man may last, but never lives,
Who much receives, but nothing gives.”

Yes, there is, in a healthy human, a sort of creative instinct. We wish to get something done, and not just to be always done-for. We rejoice in enterprise, fully more than in entertainment. Indeed, I believe that is the reason why some men wish to get up on their feet and speak—instead of being mere listeners all the time. In many cases it is not just that they may ‘hear themselves speak:’ it is, rather, that they are not going to be content with being passive humans,—they mean to be active humans. Sometimes, of course, the outcome of that sort of ambition is rather tiresome and irritating. But, my friends, I, for one, am always ready to welcome anything that means life, anything that means originality, anything that means that a fellow wishes to get something done. To quote Carlyle again (the same passage that I had occasion to use the other Sunday),—“Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest infinitesimal fraction of a Product, produce it, in God’s name! ’Tis the utmost thou hast in thee? Out with it, then.”

Then, what about—say—a physician or a surgeon devoting his time and skill and his nerve-energy and his thought to the saving of human life? Whoever, in such case, ‘receives’ new health and new hope is, indeed, to be counted happy. But is the ‘giver,’ in such case, not to be counted happy also,—if not, indeed, the happier of the two? I read, just the other day, of an American Medical Missionary in Arabia (Dr. Paul Harrison), to whom not long ago an Arab brought one of his children for treatment. The only hope of a cure was to have a transfusion of blood, and Dr. Harrison asked the father if he would allow a vein in his arm to be opened that

some of his blood might be passed to his child. As one might have almost expected in the case of a superstitious man of the desert, he refused unequivocally. But what was his astonishment when he saw Dr. Harrison quietly open a vein in his own arm and transmit some of his blood to the child? Truly, that child was "blessed" in 'receiving' the new life. Ay, but what about the 'blessedness' of the man who 'gave' it? Was it not—there and then—even "more blessed to give than to receive?" Yes, my friends, I believe it *was* "more *blessed*."

For, what is like the content of that wonderful Bible word "blessed?" We have never yet pluck'd out the heart of its mystery.' You will not find the full meaning of the word "blessed" in any dictionary. It cannot be precisely defined. Because it implies something of the mystic touch of the Spirit of Christ—something of "the peace of God which passeth all understanding." Only, I think I can tell—sometimes in fifteen or twenty minutes—whether or not a given individual is "blessed." Some men and women I know, have been disappointed and tried so as almost to 'beggar description:' nevertheless there is no slightest doubt that they are "blessed." Other men and women I know are apparently prosperous and care-free: nevertheless I am persuaded that they are not "blessed." No, it is neither fortune nor favor that makes one "blessed." It is the presence in oneself of "the mind of Christ;" the magnetism of the Holy Spirit; the poise and peace that come of being 'in tune with the Infinite.'

And so, my friends,—to advance a stage now—"where

the Spirit of the Lord is" there is no possible room for doubt that "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

For instance, what about a truly Christ-loving and Christ-inspired Mother? How much her children owe to her,—to her care, to her sweet and sanctifying influence, to her nightly prayers! An incalculable debt, that. Ay, but are the children "more blessed" than the saintly mother? I trow not. For, mark you, it is not just a question of happiness (which, we are sometimes told, is the equivalent of 'blessedness.') No, it's something far better—far deeper—than 'happiness:' it is 'blessedness.'

Then, which is better: to have a friend, or to *be* a friend? To my thinking, there is no question which is better. For if, according to Emerson, "a friend may well be reckoned the masterpiece of Nature," then what can be "more blessed" than to *be* such a masterpiece? And surely to be to a fellow-human a very friend "in Christ's stead" is the very acme of distinction and of blessedness. Yes, indeed, to "give" in such wise is to have the "double portion" of friendship's blessing: on the principle expressed by Russell Lowell, when he says,

"Be noble! and the nobleness which lies

In other men, sleeping but never dead,

Will rise in majesty to meet thine own."

Or, again, "blessed" as it is to "receive" comfort and encouragement and heart-of-grace, is it not even "more blessed" to be privileged to "give" such things? It is told of Sir Joshua Reynolds, the great portrait-painter of the 18th century, whose picture entitled 'Simplicity' all of you must know from the prints of it, (it is told of him) that once when he was appealed-to by a younger

artist who was in financial straits, he called upon the younger man and ascertained the amount of his indebtedness. It was forty pounds English (the equivalent of \$200). Well, after interviewing the young man, Sir Joshua prepared to leave; and (according to the 'Percy Anecdotes,' where the story is told) "he took him by the hand, and, after pressing it in a friendly manner, he hurried off, with that kind of triumph in his heart which the exalted of human kind alone can experience, while the astonished artist found that he had left in his hand a bank-note for a hundred pounds" (or, \$500). Which was really the happier man? Anyhow, which was the more "blessed" of the two? Was it not the 'giver' on that occasion?—for will you note that passage in the story (referring to Sir Joshua), "With that kind of triumph in his heart which the exalted of human kind alone can experience!"

And, do you know, my friends, I am sometimes secretly half-glad that the Christian ministry is rather an underpaid profession. For, I tell you, we preachers do not wish to be tempted in any way whatever to think that it is more blessed to receive than to give. This is the "joy and crown" of a preacher's work,—if he is faithful and true: "to give" of his best, in the very spirit of the Master Himself, for the comfort and the uplift and the inspiration of his fellow-humans. And there is infinitely more joy, let me tell you, for the ambassador of Christ, in that 'giving' than in all his possible getting. Yes, friends, I have been gladdened and honored, from time to time, by the gratitude (frequently very substantially expressed) of those whom I have tried to encourage and to hearten.

And in some instances the gratitude has obviously been very deep and heart-felt. But seldom has their souls' joy out-topped mine at being used by the Father to give "the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness:" for "it is more blessed to give than to receive."

Let me tell you about an elderly woman in my former Church over the water. She was very poor, and it was my duty to take to her, periodically, a certain sum of money which was her due according to our Church's provision. Well, on each of these occasions she gave me a small sum of money for the Missionary work of the Church,—because, spite of her humble circumstances, she had the international mind and the world-vision. I almost felt, at first, as if I were stealing—to take that contribution (small as it was, comparatively). But it was not long ere I discovered that that woman would have been more chagrined had I refused her missionary contribution than had I appeared at her home on the day expected without her allowance. *She* believed—she *knew*—that "it is more blessed to give than to receive". Yes, she often experienced 'that kind of triumph in the heart which the exalted of human kind alone can experience'.

And, my friends, has it not been proved beyond all possibility of dispute that the 'giving' Church is the Church that is "blessed?" Not necessarily the wealthy Church. No, no: but the Church which knows what it is to 'give' both prayers and pence, as well as to enjoy these things: the Church which looks beyond its own circle of folk, and plans by every means it knows for the whole Community in which it stands and for the whole World to which it is related "in Christ:" the Church

which understands—and acts upon the understanding—that “the more religion we export, the more we possess,” for “love grows by exercise.”

“I have showed you,” says St. Paul, then, “(I have showed you) . . . how that . . . ye ought . . . to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how HE said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.” And, O my friends, how “the LORD JESUS” practised as He preached! How He lived out the principle of these words of His! He ‘gave,’ and ‘gave,’ and ‘gave.’ He gave His life. He “gave Himself.” What princely ‘giving!’ And, how infinitely “blessed!”

Ay, we say, with the angelic voices of the Book of Revelation, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to *receive* power, and riches, and wisdom, and strength, and honour, and glory, and blessing.” And we count Him “blessed,” we are glad to count Him “blessed,” to be ‘receiving’ these things. But, brethren, the ‘blessedness’ of our Saviour’s ‘receiving’ the homage of men and of angels is not to be compared to the ‘blessedness’ of His ‘giving’ (His ‘giving Himself’)—with all that it has meant—and means today—for human hearts and for the ‘touching’ of human life “to immortality.” And so, was it not said, long before Christ came to earth, “And men shall be blessed in Him” and “all nations shall call HIM Blessed”?

XVII

DISHONORABLE EXEMPTION FROM SERVICE

"And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? Let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his."—DEUTERONOMY XX, 8.

I TELL you, my friends, these old Hebrew documents are well worth the reading: even those of them which, on a first perusal, appear all too antiquated and uninteresting. Here, for example,—in this chapter of Deuteronomy—we have an excerpt (so to speak) from the Army Orders of the Hebrews. The children of Israel were, at the time referred to, "a camp" rather than "a kingdom,—entering upon an enemy's country, and not yet settled in a country of their own; and, besides the war they were now entering upon in order to their settlement, even after their settlement they could neither protect nor enlarge their coast without hearing the alarms of war. It was therefore needful that they should have directions given them in their military affairs." They are no sealed and secret orders, either, that are given here; but open and for all.

The chief point seems to be that they are on no account to be afraid: and the call-to-courage is based on the assurance that GOD would be with them.

Then, certain exemptions are allowed: mostly in favor

of those who happen, on the approach of war, to have some important undertakings on hand—especially in the way of home-making (an illustration, by the way, of the humaneness of the Mosaic code).

Then comes another kind of exemption—rather a dishonorable exemption for those whom it should concern: the exemption of the “fearful and fainthearted.” They were not wanted in the ranks: “And the officers shall speak further unto the people, and they shall say, What man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren’s heart faint as well as his heart.”

There are, as you are aware, various tests of soldiership proposed in most civilized countries. A man must not be over a certain age, nor under a certain height. He must be a healthy human: in particular, should have good teeth and good eye-sight, and should have his feet in good walking-trim. And so forth. But there are other tests of soldiership besides these,—more spiritual tests. For instance, it has been said that ‘a soldier’s first duty is obedience, and his second duty obedience, and his third duty obedience.’ The soldier should be “arm’d with resolution.” And doesn’t Shakespeare say,

“Ambition,

“The soldier’s virtue, rather makes choice of loss,

“Than gain which darkens him?”

In other words, besides good eye-sight and good teeth and so many cubits of stature, the true soldier must have pluck and courage and stout-heartedness. The “fearful and

faint-hearted" are better at home. They are perhaps not much use at home, either,—these cravens: but on the battlefield they are hopeless. No use themselves, and discouragers of others: "let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his heart." No room in the army for the men of 'buts' and 'ifs': whether the army be the battalions of a nation or the battalions of Christ's Kingdom. . . . "The fearful and fainthearted" have lost more battles than have been lost through lack of men or lack of munitions. And, the "fearful and fainthearted" have done more to retard the progress of the Kingdom of God on earth than the opposition of the devil himself.

You remember how Gideon—Israel's famous 'judge'—thinned out his army. Taking the hint from God Himself, he made up his mind to have picked men only—out of a following of thirty-two thousand. A proclamation was made accordingly, in these terms,—“Whosoever is fearful and afraid, let him return and depart early from mount Gilead.” “And,” we read, “there returned of the people twenty and two thousand; and there remained ten thousand.” But yet a further test was proposed; until ultimately only Gideon and his “three hundred” were left—tried and not “found wanting”—“And the LORD said unto Gideon, By the three hundred men . . . will I save you . . . ; and let all the other people go every man unto his place.”

It is told of a famous general that, on one occasion, wishing to inspire his men with something of his own courage and determination, he took his position in the forefront of the battle, thus exposing himself to the hot-

test fire . . . An affectionate but over-cautious friend, seeing him in such peril, darted forward, seized him by the arm, and exclaimed, 'Retire, I beseech you, from this shower of bullets, or you will be a dead man!' 'Sir,' said the general, releasing himself from his friend's grasp, 'if I had been afraid of bullets, I should have quitted the profession of a soldier long ago.'

I was reading lately about a Scottish chaplain with the forces in the north of France. During one of the severest and bloodiest fights of the war in that region he was being convoyed by an officer through a stretch of wood, where he heard the crackle of the bullets among the trees about his very ears. He didn't quite like it, and said something to that effect to the officer; but the officer only replied, Scotch fashion, "Tut, man, the bullets that ye *hear* 'll no do ye ony harm."

And then, in a fine passage of Shakespeare's 'Macbeth' you have the test of true soldiership brought out by the masterhand:—

(Ross) "Your son, my lord, has paid a soldier's debt:

He only lived but till he was a man:

The which no sooner had his prowess confirmed

In the unshrinking station where he fought,

But like a man he died."

(Siward) "Then he is dead?"

(Ross) "Ay and brought off the field: your cause of sorrow

Must not be measured by his worth, for then
It hath no end."

(Siward) "Had he his hurts before?"

(Ross) "Ay, on the front."

(Siward) "Why then, God's soldier be he!

Had I as many sons as I have hairs,

I would not wish them to a fairer death." . . .

"Had he his hurts before? . . . Ay, on the front."
There's a test for us, my friends! Are we sulking—or
'marching breast-forward'? Are we complaining of our
opportunities—or doing our level best just where we
are? Are we quarreling with our tools—instead of with
our skill, and with our lack-of-diligence, and lack-of-
fervor, and what not? Can we say, amid all our diffi-
culties and disappointments and dangers,

"Out of the night that covers me,

Black as the pit from pole to pole,

I thank whatever gods may be

For my unconquerable soul.

"In the fell clutch of circumstance

I have not winced nor cried aloud:

Under the bludgeons of chance

My head is bloody, but unbowed.

"Beyond the place of wrath and tears

Looms but the horror of the shade:

And yet the menace of the years

Finds, and shall find, me unafraid"?

Ay, "nothing weakens the hands," says an old writer
on this very passage, "(nothing weakens the hands) so
much as that which makes the heart tremble." We have
much need, then, (every one of us) to ask God to ful-

fill in us His promise to 'strengthen our *hearts*.' For there are serious problems to be thought-out these days, and great things to be done, by the citizens of this Republic: especially by those of us who reckon ourselves citizens, as well, of Christ's Kingdom. It is no time for a dilettante type of Christianity: it is the red-blooded type that the times call for. "Preparedness" or no "preparedness" (as the word is being used just now of army and navy), we must be *prepared* to be 'good soldiers of Jesus Christ,' prepared to be loyal to His Spirit of Love and Self-giving, prepared to refuse to lower the Flag of the Gospel—to which, you and I surely hold, every one of the world's flags (the 'Stars and Stripes' with the rest of them) must dip in acknowledgment of CHRIST'S Mastery.

Mark you, I am not one of those who are scared by a premonition of the imminent invasion of this Country. I am thinking, just now, along other lines (albeit I trust I am not careless about our national security). I am wondering "what spirit" the people of this Country are going to evince, and are going to be moved by and ruled by, in the days right ahead of us. And I am wondering whether, if it *is* to be the Spirit of CHRIST, we shall have the courage to be true to it at all hazards—to walk

"with this high goal in sight,

"To speak, to do, to sanction only Right,

"Though very heaven should fall!" . . .

And so, "what man is there that is fearful and faint-hearted? let him go and return unto his house, *lest* his brethren's heart faint, as well as his."

Ah yes: for the worst of it is that 'fear' is catching—'faintheartedness' contagious: "lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his."

My friends, do we half realize how much our moods and manners affect our *companions-by-the-way*: how apt our faith or our 'fear' is to make them faithful or "fearful"? "For none of us liveth unto himself: .

. . and whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honored, all the members rejoice with it." The truth is, every grace of character and every fault of character "goes to work in the world," and makes its impression. If you are generous, you are silently persuading your companions-of-the-way to generosity. If you are industrious, you are silently inviting and moving them to get busy. If you are cheerful and hopeful, you are lightening their faces and their hearts. While, on the other hand, if you are stingy, you make other people stingy. If you are a 'slacker' and a 'quitter,' you infect other people with the same poison. If you are morose and allow yourself to be too easily depressed, you becloud and depress 'the other fellow.' Sometimes, perhaps, a man's faults and vices drive us, by a recoil of disgust, to consider and mend our own ways: but fully oftener—and more especially in the case of taints and twists of *disposition*—we catch the infection. And so, "what man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house, lest his brethren's heart faint as well as his."

Ay, that's the trouble of it. If our moral and spiritual diseases were self-contained and non-contagious, it wouldn't be so bad: but they have their bacilli, which leap

out (the little imps!) wherever they think they can fasten. "Destroy not him with *thy* meat," says St. Paul, you remember, in a well-known passage where he is dealing with the contagiousness of conduct, "(destroy not him with thy meat) for whom Christ died." Similarly, by a fair implication, "Destroy not him with thy pride, or thy crankiness, or thy cowardice, or thy faithlessness,—for whom Christ died."

"Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another."

And now, my friends, just a word or two in closing on *How to Deal with the "fearful and fainthearted."*

There are two ways of dealing with them. We may call them, respectively, the Quick way and the Quickening way; or the Mandatory way and the Magnetic way.

The quick, or mandatory, way is the way spoken of in our text: "what man is there that is fearful and fainthearted? let him go and return unto his house." He is not wanted. Let him get out. Yes, on occasion that is the only way to deal with certain types of people: be it 'faintheartedness' that is their fault, or be it frivolity in presence of serious issues, or be it profane or unclean speech, or what not. That is, on occasion, the only way to deal with them,—to tell them peremptorily that they are not wanted. It may be hard, sometimes, both for the man who is 'fired' and for the man who 'fires' him. But if it is necessary,

"then 't were well

"It were done quickly."

"But, brethren, looking to the farther issues, there is "a

more excellent way:" the quickening, or magnetic, way. You have it suggested in that most beautiful and most heartening chapter of Isaiah (the XXXVth)—on this wise, "Strengthen ye the weak hands, and confirm the feeble knees. Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not." You have it outlined, again, in one of St. Paul's Epistles—on this wise, "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men." It is, in fact, the Gospel way of dealing with people,—especially those who are naturally sensitive and timid and hopeless—and all who are easily discouraged. It is, I say, the Gospel way of dealing with such folk: quickening and magnetic,—getting such folk made-over and energized anew by the infusion of the grace of God. Ah yes, my friends, let us never forget that—to use His own words—our Lord Jesus Christ came to our feeble and broken humanity "not . . . to destroy, but to fulfill;"—"not to condemn, but to save." He had special regard to, and He took pains to seek-out and re-magnetize and to give-new-heart-of-grace-to, the "least" and the "last" and the "lost." Sometimes we are like to be very impatient and very drastic with the "fearful and faint-hearted;" ay, and with hosts of other people who are weak just where we, perhaps, are strong. Well, my friends, suppose we try the "more excellent way,"—the way of the Master,—the Gospel way,—the way that St. Paul indicates when he says, "To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak." And mark you this, my friends; we must never lose faith in the wonder-working power of Grace—in the power of the Spirit

of Christ to remake. There are hundreds of men and women in the world today who are saying, with great variety of content to the words indeed—but all in praise of redeeming grace, (there are hundreds of men and women . . . who are saying), “One thing I know, that, whereas I was blind, now I see.” Brethren, in dealing with ourselves and with our near comrades and with the whole human situation,—“if GOD be for us!”—what an Ally to have—even HE Who says, “Behold, I am the LORD, the God of all flesh: is there anything too hard for ME?”

XVIII

REFRESHMENT OF SPIRIT

"For they have refreshed my spirit."—I CORINTHIANS
XVI, 18.

ST. PAUL closes each of his Epistles with a chapter, or part of a chapter, composed of greetings—expressions of kind remembrance and good will. Some of these 'greetings'-sections contain quite a number of proper names,—not a few of which are the names of men and women who are not elsewhere referred to. But, if you read with seeing eyes and 'understanding hearts,' you discover that the 'greetings'-sections of St. Paul's Epistles are not just catalogues of proper names. They are more and better than that. They contain some beautiful touches,—touches of spiritual discernment and spiritual appreciation, and some wonderfully astute and heartening revelations of character. It would be a pity, then, to pass them over lightly.

Here, for instance, speaking of a certain trio of individuals by name—Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus—he says he is glad of their coming (that is, their coming from the Church at Corinth, to which the Epistle is about to be sent, to the place where the Epistle is being written—probably Ephesus): "I am glad of the coming of" these men; "for," he adds, "they have refreshed my spirit."

Now, what do we know of these three men? Well, of Stephanas we are told that he and his "house" were

"the first fruits of Achaia:" that is to say, the first family in Southern Greece to join the Church. Of the other two—Fortunatus and Achaicus—we know nothing except what is said here.

No great material for a triple biography! No: but what is said here of these three men is to their everlasting credit and honor; and their names are on our lips today as the names of three men who were "boosters," who put heart into a fourth man—of greater caliber than themselves. By their "coming" to the Apostle—hard-wrought and weary as he probably was—(by their "coming" to the Apostle) at a particular season, and—we may assume—by their good report of Christian progress in the city of Corinth, and by their wise and friendly words they 'refreshed his spirit'—refreshed the spirit of a great and good and useful man.

They did well—both for him and for themselves, and for their common Master. "For they have refreshed my spirit."

Yes, mark you, if those who are not so able nor so proficient-in-character-and-usefulness as you are, are advantaged by your sympathy and your help; those also who are abler and better than you are, are advantaged by these things. They are not, as you might suppose, independent of you and your encouragement. And so it has been said, by a very discerning soul, "To illuminate for an instant the depths of a deep soul, to cheer those who bear by sympathy the burdens of so many sorrow-laden hearts and suffering lives, is to me a blessing and a precious privilege. There is a sort of religious joy in helping to renew the strength and courage of noble minds.

We are surprised to find ourselves the possessors of a power of which we are not worthy, and we long to exercise it purely and seriously." How beautifully true! And what a tribute to the spiritual possibilities of usefulness of those who may be of meager equipment and of humble station!

"They have refreshed my spirit:" they have encouraged me: they have given me heartening (and I needed it).

How much we all need that type of 'refreshment!' Spiritual 'refreshment.' Some new uplift. Some new elasticity of soul. A fresh draught of the "water of life." For the world is "sore with many sorrows, many blows, and we know not how much good a tender voice and a soft hand may do."

The Apostle does not say precisely *how* these three men 'refreshed his spirit.' He simply says, "I am glad of their coming; . . . for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied" (in other words, their being with me is just as if you were all with me in heartening fellowship).

"I am glad of their coming." Just their "coming." O yes, it is wonderful how little is needed, sometimes, to 'refresh our spirits.' Suppose I read you a short letter I received the other day. It reached me last Tuesday morning, and is from Dr. Butler—whose talk from this platform a few weeks ago was such a blessing to us all:—"January 18th, 1915, (that was Monday): Dear Mr. Buchanan, Your men have a rich treat in store in hearing ——— tomorrow night! Wish I could be there to hear

him again. I go to Cleveland next Sunday to assist in the campaign for Relief and Sustentation. Shall not soon forget the delightful day I spent with you and your people. Very kind personal regards,—sincerely yours, Charles S. Butler.” Dr. Butler didn’t need, by any means, to write that letter; but I am glad he did, for it “refreshed my spirit.” The spontaneity of it, the kindness of it, the underlying assumption that a great group of us are all engaged in the same work—and need the same sort of heartening—and that we are glad to rejoice with one another when it is time to rejoice: these things appealed to me like the sound of fine music or like an exhilarating breeze from the hills.

I have said, mark you, that the Doctor *didn’t need* to write that letter. But, brethren, many times it is the things we don’t need to do, but which we do for love’s sake—for Christ’s sake, that are the best things we do, and the most distinctively Christian. If we only did what we needed to do in this world, life would be a mighty bare and lustreless and unexhilarating affair. You remember how Jesus said, “If ye love them which love you . . . and if ye salute your brethren only, what do ye more than others?” In other words, if we respect our natural affinities only, and if we do only what we are obliged to do—to save our skins or to keep up our reputation, and so forth; why! then we are not rising above the common level of unregenerate humanity. We must go at least one better than that, if we have felt the touch of the Spirit of Christ. Or, as Christ Himself put it, in the same talk from which I have just quoted, “Whosoever shall compel thee to go a mile, go with him twain.”

Yes, it is going the *second* mile—when we do not need to, as a matter of obligation—(it is going the second mile) that justifies us in saying that “we have the mind of Christ.” . . .

“They have refreshed my *spirit*.” Think and speak as we will about the apparent materialism of people, what the vast majority of normal men and women most long-for is ‘refreshment of spirit,’ uplift of soul, heartening. They do not wish to be insulted by being perpetually appealed-to on the lower plane. They do not wish to be talked-to and treated as if they were mere animals—

“sheep or goats

“That nourish a blind life within the brain.”

They have souls, they “hold of God”: and they wish to be dealt-with accordingly.

To be sure, refreshment of *body* is of great moment. Indeed, many a time the immediate and obvious way to refresh a man’s spirit is to give him some material assistance,—to give him a good square meal, or to let him have a few dollars. And there are some people to whom we should be ashamed to make the spiritual appeal until we have contrived to make their surroundings or their working conditions more congenial and more human.

But, brethren, every human knows perfectly well that

“Man doth not live by bread alone,

But all that cometh from the throne”;

that he needs the food of the soul.

And, I tell you, some of you who have perhaps not studied human nature as I have would wonder how keen is the human soul-hunger, and how grateful

most folk are for the higher appeals and the deeper consolations. Ay, let us never forget that there is in this world a great deal of spiritual weariness, of disheartenment; and the gladdest thing many persons can say of their "helpers and friends" is that 'they have refreshed their spirits.'

Unfortunately there are some individuals here and there busy doing the very opposite thing. Instead of 'refreshing the spirits' of their fellows, they are doing their worst to wear them out, to tire them beyond endurance, to break them. By perpetually nagging and kicking, or by one heinous device after another, they are trying to discourage and to down people. And in some cases the thing is being done with deliberately devilish diligence. Needless to say, it is wicked—the very worst kind of wickedness; and one is almost afraid to think what will be the fate of such inhuman schemers. Only, there is this to say—thank God: that for every two or three individuals who *are* discouraged and downed by such scoundrelism, there are dozens who do not heed it, who are, in fact, but confirmed and put on their mettle by it. Doesn't St. Paul say, in this same chapter, "A great door and effectual is opened unto me, *and* there are many adversaries?" Not "*but* there are many adversaries;" but "*and* there are many adversaries,"—as if the existence of the "adversaries" were a spur and an incentive to go in and win.

Yes, but it would hardly do if there were none but "adversaries." Thank God, then, for the "helpers and friends of mankind:" those who are always for cheering us on our way and giving us a lift, those who "own .

. . . those welcome faces That bring sunshine to life's shadowed places," those who 'refresh our spirits.' They are to us, indeed, "in Christ's stead",—channels of His grace, of His counsel and His consolation. "Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God."

Ay, "they shall be called the children of GOD." For God Himself—"the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort"—(God Himself) is the great Refresher of our spirits. In a kindly variety of ways HE is heartening us and encouraging us day by day. "Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation."

No doubt there are many happenings which make it seem as if the Almighty were trying to weary us and to crush our spirits; and some people are hard hit. But, my friends, if there is one thing to be guarded against with all our powers of assiduousness, it is focussing all our attention on the trials and tragedies of life. Let us keep our faces to the light as much as we can, and see the gifts and opportunities and joys of life. Why! there are the days, which, as Emerson says, "are ever divine, .

. . . of the least pretension, and of the greatest capacity, of anything that exists." There are "the friendly stars" (as they have been called). There are the sights and sounds and scents, and the far horizons, of "God's Out-of-doors." There is the gift of sleep,—as free to the beggar as to the prince. And there is Music, which is "Love in search of a word." And there are our Friends, and our Books, and our Pictures. And, if there

be Good Health besides, is not our cup 'running over'? Truly, the "times of refreshing from the presence of the Lord" are with us yet,—every day and every night. And so, as the familiar Psalm has it, "It is a good thing . . . O most High, to show forth Thy loving kindness in the morning, and Thy faithfulness every night."

And then, best of all the Father's gifts of encouragement, and back of them all, is the Everlasting Gospel: the Gospel of forgiveness and restoration for the sin-sick and the sin-stained, the Gospel of liberty for the enthralled, the Gospel of good-cheer for the disappointed, the Gospel of consolation for the bereaved, the Gospel of opportunity—too—for the strong and the alert. "For they have refreshed my spirit." How—think you—did they 'refresh his spirit?' Not apart from CHRIST, you may be sure. O yes, my friends, if only the great body of Christ's men and women understood better the beauty and the satisfaction and the power of the Christian Gospel, and if only they would dare to apply the Gospel to the human situation in all the deepness and in all the wideness of its reach; there would be far fewer weary and discouraged souls in the world than there are today, and far more people rejoicing in the 'refreshment of their spirits.' . . . But to a large extent our eyes are yet holden, that we do not know HIM.

And right here I should like to make an appeal—especially to the MEN of Christendom. Here we have St. Paul saying (for he was human, and needed such 'refreshment')—here we have St. Paul saying, "For they have refreshed my spirit." And you remember how it is told us in the Old Testament that, when Saul had been

chosen first king of Israel, "there went with him a band of *men*, whose hearts God had touched." Well, here is what I wish to be at. Some of you men (and, mark you, I have in mind today the men of all our Churches and on the fringes of our Churches: for I always try to talk with the world-vision in my soul, and not provincially) —well, frankly, some of you men are not enthusiastic about the Church. Because, perhaps, you think there is too much hypocrisy, and too much time-serving, and too much petty jealousy, and what not, in the Church: or because, perhaps, you think that the Church is not doing anything like all that it might do, and the ministers (many of them) are not sufficiently equipped nor sufficiently up-to-date: or because, perhaps,—other reasons. And so you are not enthusiastic, as I have said; and you are content with being, so to speak, mere listeners and spectators, with contributions given for value received: but, all the while, with a certain critical aloofness as the atmosphere in which your thoughts about the Church move. But, men and brethren, that is not the way to make things better. All honor to the great multitude of noble women who are doing the work of the Kingdom and serving the Christian Church! Yet the Church of the Living God needs the *men*: needs the men to get behind the ministers (with all their inadequacy)—needs the men to line up with the ministers, and to work along with them. Yes, we need 'bands of *men* whose hearts God has touched' to 'refresh our spirits' and to strengthen our hands for a Work which is more needed today than ever it was, and to which, I believe, the world is more ready to respond today than it has been in long years. .

. . Now, please don't imagine that I am saying all this because I am personally discouraged. Usually when I am personally discouraged, I do not say so. But *you men* ought to be collectively discouraged that the Church is not doing more than it is—that the impact of Christianity on the world is far too feeble yet: and you ought to end your discouragement by getting up and saying, "We must, we can, we will do it."

And so now let me read the whole clause from which my text is taken: "For they have refreshed my spirit, *and your's.*"

XIX

NO FUEL, NO FIRE

"Where no wood is, there the fire goeth out."—PROVERBS
XXVI, 20.

“**W**HERE no wood is, the fire goeth out.” Or, as we might put it even more briefly, “No fuel, no fire.”

You see how the master-artist in proverb-writing applies this particular proverb in the first instance. “Strife,” or contention, is as ‘a fire; heating the spirit, burning up all that is good, and putting families and societies into a flame.’ Here, then, we are told how that fire of strife is usually kindled and kept burning; that we may know what to do—or what not to do—in order to let the fire ‘go out.’ Stop putting on fuel: in other words, stop the tale-bearing.

The Bible has some very terse and trenchant things to say about “tale-bearing” or “whispering.” “Thou shalt not go up and down as a talebearer among thy people,” says the old Hebrew Law: and you may be sure that was one of the sayings of “them of old time” which our Saviour did not repeal. In the passage before us this evening it is said, “The words of a talebearer are as wounds:” and in another chapter of the Book of Proverbs we read, “A whisperer separateth chief friends.” Then in his Epistle to the Romans, in a catalogue of those types of people who ‘do not like to retain God in

their knowledge,' but have been 'given over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient,' in that catalogue St. Paul includes "whisperers." And, in writing to the Corinthians, the same Apostle expresses the fervent hope that he may find no "whisperings" among them when he reaches their city.

I would refer you, also, to such Scripture sayings as these—on the taming of the tongue. "I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue." "Set a watch, O Lord, before my mouth; keep the door of my lips." "If any man among you seemeth to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, . . . this man's religion is vain." And, scores of similar passages. It would be interesting to make a collection of Scripture passages referring to the use of the tongue—the use of words—the right and godly use of words; which may be either the finest or the foulest things in this world of speaking humans.

Well then, "Where no wood is, the fire goeth out: so where there is no talebearer, the strife ceaseth."— No fuel, no fire: so—no talebearer, no turmoil.

The trouble is, so many people seem to delight in adding fuel to the fire in this matter. Some men would rather carry tales to 'whisper' with, than tools to work with; and some women would rather be talebearers than childbearers.

Of course the talebearer does not wish to be reckoned malicious; and so he usually introduces his blighting story by apparently implying that he—for one—does not wish to believe it. "Surely it can't be true that"—and so on. Or, "She's a fine girl, but it's a pity she"—and

so on. And the devilish work of stoking the fire of scandal and strife has begun. "False apostles," says the New Testament, "deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ. And no marvel; for Satan Himself is transformed into an angel of light."

Anyhow, it is all too rife in this world,—the 'tale-bearing,' the 'whispering:' and perhaps especially rife in the smaller communities of the civilized Countries, and many a cluster of human habitations which is beautiful to look upon and attractive to people of good taste is rotten with 'talebearing' and scandal-mongering. Ay, the flaw in the landscape may be, not in the place, but in the people. As you read in the Book of Genesis of a certain Palestinian town, "And Lot lifted up his eyes, and beheld all the plain of Jordan, that it was well watered everywhere, . . . even as the garden of the Lord.

. . . Then Lot chose him all the plain of Jordan; and . . . dwelt in . . . Sodom. But the men of Sodom" (*the people of the place*) "were wicked and sinners before the Lord exceedingly."

What, then, is to be the remedy for all the irritation and strife and shame that are caused by this 'talebearing?' Obviously, stop the talebearing. Cut it out. Cut off the supply of fuel. For "where no wood is, the fire goeth out:" *no fuel, no fire.*

Unfortunately the fuel, in this matter, is not easy to get at, so that we may keep it out of the fire. It is not all gathered together in one place,—like the wood in a wood-pile or the coal in a coal-cellar. It is scattered all about. There is rather a quaint story told of St. Philip Neri,—a prominent Italian Churchman of the 16th cen-

tury; to whom, one day—in course of confession, a lady accused herself of having spread slanderous stories, and asked the famous priest how she might be cured. “Go,” said he, “to the market, buy a chicken newly killed, and bring it to me, plucking its feathers all the way as you come back.” The lady wondered how a dead chicken could help her to overcome her talebearing habit; but she did as she had been told, and came back to the priest with the plucked chicken. “Now,” said he, “retrace your steps, and bring me all the feathers you have scattered.” “But that is impossible,” she replied, “I cast the feathers carelessly, and the wind (for it is breezy to-day) must have carried them away: how can I gather them all together again?” “Ah,” said the priest, “that is exactly like your slanderous tales and whisperings. They have been scattered about in all directions, and you cannot take them back. Give the thing up.” “Where no wood is, the fire goeth out: so where there is no tale-bearer”

And similarly, my friends, with other bad feeders of unwelcome and disastrous fires.

If certain articles of diet are injuring your health and your efficiency,—stop the supply. If some habit of life is spoiling you mentally and ruining your soul,—cut it out. If some form of recreation or amusement is like to get too strong a hold of you, so that you are neglecting your appointed life-work and taking no time for self-culture,—(to say the least of it) reduce the quantity of fuel. If a certain type of reading is making you unwholesomely discontented and restless, or is feeding the fires of your baser passions,—stop getting that kind

of book.

The truth is, brethren, while "there is . . . need for caution in things of intellect, . . . it is fatal policy in things of conscience." There are some things we dare not attempt to compromise with. The only thing to do is . . . to leave them alone. As this same Book of Proverbs would say, 'Avoid them, pass not by them, turn from them, and pass away.'

'No fuel, no fire!'

But now, my friends, I wish to take our text, for a little while, in a positive way, not a negative way. "Where no wood is, the fire goeth out." Yes, but there are fires that are eminently useful and welcome, and which it would be a shame to let-go-out.

There is, for example, the fire of righteous indignation: revolt of heart and mind against all that is base and debasing. And, there is the fire of ambition—pure and wholesome ambition. And, there is the fire of enthusiasm—enthusiasm for the things that are worth while. And, there is the fire of love—true love. And, there is the fire of the Christ-touched purpose of making oneself useful in one's day.

In short, there are various kinds of holy fires. They burn, for the most part, rather quietly; but intensely and through-and-through. *Provided*—they are properly fuelled: fuelled regularly, and methodically, and with the best kind of fuel—if it may be.

What, then, are some of the right kinds of fuel to use, if we are to be on fire with the best interests and desires and enthusiasms—and on fire with the doing of things?

‘No fuel, no fire.’

There is, first of all, the Fuel of Intelligence. We must know about things. We must keep ourselves informed. As I have said so frequently, you can’t expect to be interested in things you know nothing about. If you wish to be a good musician, you must read-up music, and practice. If you wish to be a good teacher, you must keep adding to your own store of information and keep disciplining yourself in the points of good teaching. If you wish to be a good conversationalist, you must have something to say, and you must school yourself to talk well. If you wish to love tenderly and deeply and abidingly, you must (as the Scripture phrases it) ‘keep yourselves in’ the loving—by doing diligently and devotedly the things love prompts you to do: else, the fire will burn low, and love will cool,—and then goodbye happiness. If you wish to be of real service to your community, you must know your community and its needs and keep yourself in touch with people. Or, if you wish to be a live and active Church Worker, you must know something of what the Church of Christ has done in days gone by and is doing today. Here is part of a little paragraph I lighted upon a couple of days ago: it is entitled “Keeping up to date:” “In all lines of business today men read their trade journals. Doctors read their medical papers, lawyers the law journals, and preachers a great many things: every man reads something bearing on his line of work. Every Christian should be engaged in the business of the Kingdom of God, and it should be the primary duty of each one to be informed about the progress of events connected with this Kingdom. No

one can escape this responsibility for intelligent interest and information." When, for instance, I read (as I did lately) that "the same notice boards" in several provinces of China, "which a few years ago held edicts proclaiming death to the "foreign devils," recently displayed posters advertising Mr. Eddy's evangelistic meetings"; my interest in the propagation of the Gospel in the Far East is immensely quickened. Or when I read (as I did the other day) that the pastor of the German Mission in Hong Kong informed one of our missionaries in China that the first gift he received after the declaration of war was ten pounds sterling (\$50.00) from an English missionary in Hankow; then I am persuaded that there is something else—and something better—working in the world today than the war-fever and commercial cut-throatism and international jealousy,—even the Christian Spirit of Brotherhood, and my faith is refreshed in "the goodness of the Lord in the land of the living." Curiously enough, my friends, one of the items of information I have just given you is taken from a page in a very valuable Missionary publication headed "*Fuel for Missionary Fires.*"

Then, there is the Fuel of the Word of God: the very best kind of fuel for keeping the fires of aspiration and of Christian purpose and of Christian love burning bright and sure, and with a steady glow. I am accustomed to say (and have I not both fact and right on my side?) that the best type of Christian is the Bible Christian: the man who has got the soul of this Book into his own soul, and who is really trying to respond to its highest appeals and to live according to its highest stand-

ards. To be sure, our views of the inspiration of Scripture are less mechanical (and, I trust, more rational) than the views of some previous generations of Christians. But we cannot get past the fact that this is still the most wonderful Book known to human kind, and the most inspirational. To be sure also, we are agreed, with the New Testament that "the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life," and that one may know one's Bible familiarly well and yet be a poor specimen of a Christian. Yes, but how can you hope to get at the "spirit" of this Book—or of any book,—if you are quite unfamiliar with the "letter" of it? 'No fuel, no fire.'

And here is a pointer for my young friends in particular. Miss Margaret Slattery, whose name most of you must know, and who is so deeply interested in the girl-life of this Country, tells of a girl of fourteen or fifteen years of age who was in the habit of reading a few chapters from some trashy, but exciting, novel every night last thing before she retired to rest. The results were disastrous: she went off her sleep, and her health—both material and spiritual—was being sacrificed on the altar of questionable fiction. One day a girl friend of hers—a couple of years her senior—presented her with a little Scripture Calendar, with a selection of Scripture passages on each page—and a page for each day, and asked her if she would not read one of these pages each evening last thing before retiring to rest,—marking any passages that specially appealed to her. She did so,—read and marked, and became more and more interested in the great Book. The results were marvellous: retiring to rest each night with high and holy thoughts in her heart, she slept

soundly and purely, and in a short time became a new creature—body and mind and soul. Now, my friends, I am human enough to understand that it is not essential that what that individual girl did we must all do in precisely the same fashion; but the pith and point of Miss Slattery's narrative are obvious. O yes, our better natures are crying out for 'food convenient for them.' The purer fires within us are demanding the best kind of fuel.

Then, there is the Fuel of Meditation: "While I was musing," says the XXXIXth Psalm, "while I was musing (meditating), the fire burned."

Now, you will find that the dictionary meaning of Meditation is given as 'deep thought,' 'serious contemplation,' or some such phrase. And it has been suggested by some that the word "meditate" is derived from the Latin 'medius' (meaning, middle or midst): so that to "meditate" on a thing is just to get into the middle of it, to become absorbed in it, to go to the very heart of it.

Ah, my friends, *that* is why so many people are not on fire about the things that are most worth while, are not on fire about the big projects. They are not meditating on them. They are not getting to the heart of them. They are only skimming across the surface. As if a man might expect a good yield from his garden by using the rake only on the surface, and not plough and spade and cultivator as well! Are you envying some individuals their success, or what is called their personal magnetism? And, are you putting it all down to luck? I tell you, No: nine cases out of ten, it is not luck that has done it, but hard work—deliberate abandon and absorption—concentration—getting to the heart of things and staying

there. A man in this Village was asked the other day how he had managed to make such a success of a certain venture. His answer was, "By giving my mind to it." I am not an expert housekeeper; but I know that the only really thorough and satisfactory way of scrubbing a floor is to get down on your hands and knees to it. And, . . . "it is no use to wait for your ship to come in, unless you have sent one out." "Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might." . . .

And now, friends, there is but one other kind of Fuel I wish to speak of just now: a kind of Fuel, this time, which is good to use if we wish to help the other fellow to keep *his* fire burning well. I mean, Encouragement. The holy fires are burning pretty low in some folks' hearts—just for lack of that sort of fuel. Perhaps they haven't a great deal of it in their own cellars. Perhaps (I mean) they are constitutionally morbid and fearful and self-distrustful, and little inclined to be sanguine. Well, you know what such people need. Just a word of good cheer. Just a little heartening.

Of course we cannot always be patting people on the back, and saying smooth things and flattering things. There are *various* ways of encouraging people (which means, literally, putting courage into them). It is told of Sir Colin Campbell—of Indian Mutiny fame—that, when he was but a lad and was in his first battle as an army ensign, the captain of the regiment took him by the sleeve and made him walk out with him right in front of the line between their own and the enemy's fire. The captain's object (as he explained later) was to knock fear out of the lad, and give him confidence; and Campbell,

writing of the incident long years afterwards, said, "It was the greatest kindness that could have been shown me at that time." Yes, there are differences; and we must know something of human nature if we are to be judicious and effective Encouragers. But by all means let us be Encouragers: let us know how to help the other fellow stoke his fire with *that* sort of Fuel. . . . And then, brethren, when we pass on, not only shall we leave behind us here an immortality of heartening influence: we shall also find that the world beyond is, as some one has said, a place "where God is grateful to all who have been kind to His children here."

XX

'THE GIFT WITHOUT THE GIVER IS BARE'

"They . . . first gave their own selves to the Lord."—
II CORINTHIANS VIII, 5.

THIS Epistle, from which our text is taken, was from Paul to the Christians of Corinth—in Southern Greece. And in this chapter and the chapter following he is dealing particularly with the duty of Christian Giving; or rather, as he calls it, the "grace" of Christian Giving. In doing so he cites to these Corinthians the praiseworthy example of the Christians of some of the cities of Macedonia—in Northern Greece. These Northerners, he says, had given liberally. Indeed, the manner of their giving had been beyond his expectations: the explanation being that, back of all their giving, prior to all their contributing, there had been the giving of *themselves*. Their charity was out of consecration; their service out of self-surrender; their Gospel activity out of Gospel affection. "And this they did, not as we had hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God."

Brethren, one of the best things the New Testament says of our Lord Jesus Christ is that HE "gave Himself" for us. And surely, also, one of the best things that has ever been said of any group of people is that they "gave their own selves" to the King of Love and to the work of His Kingdom.

I don't know how it is, but these phrases—and the thought at the heart of them—have been much in my mind for some time past. They have been, I may almost say, haunting me. Partly, I suppose, because one finds so little of this Self-Giving in the Church of Christ. And partly also because one is bound to feel that, if men and women will 'give themselves' to the Saviour and His service, everything else will follow: a multitude of doubts and difficulties will disappear, the questionable habits will go, the whole area of life will take on a new lustre and a new sanctity, and Church attendance and Church support and the carrying on of the world's benevolences will go on apace—without there being any need of occasional volcanic efforts.

"They . . . first gave their own selves." Not simply, mark you, They gave their attention, gave their time, gave their toil, gave their money: but **GAVE THEMSELVES.**

And there is no use talking,—in every realm of life it is those who 'give themselves' who do best, who are at once most successful and most influential: those who 'lose themselves' (to use one of our Lord's most fruitful phrases)—those who 'lose themselves' in their appointed work, or in their friendships, or in their love, or in their studies, or in their Church activities.

One is bound to see that the great Benefactors of Humanity have been the men and women who have 'first given their own selves.' *That*, as I have already hinted, was the supreme and the unique distinction of **CHRIST.** Not simply that He was the purest and kindest and wisest

soul who has ever lived. Nor yet simply that He was an incomparable Teacher and an astounding Wonder-worker. Nor yet simply that He came down from the purity and dignity of God's nearer presence, and "made Himself of no reputation." No, nor yet simply that He poured out His life-blood. *But* that He "poured out His soul unto death"—"gave HIMSELF"—His very heart—His whole being. Just compare, for a moment, Jesus of Nazareth and, say, Napoleon. Napoleon was, in many respects, a transcendently great man: able, masterful, large-brained, large-visioned, and—in great measure—a sweeping conqueror. But in the end he was a failure! Why? Because, I have always felt, he never 'gave *himself*' even to his own ambitious projects, let alone any really good work. He gave everything else—brains and time and energy (doing with as little sleep as it is possible for any human to do with)—he gave everything else *except himself*. The consequence has been, that, notwithstanding the immense ability of that man, and his untiring industry, and his occasional outbursts of benevolence on a grand scale, he has not touched our hearts; and to the end of time the Christ will be immensely preferred by Humanity to the Corsican.

And of *all* the real "helpers and friends of mankind" it may truly be said that they "first gave their own selves,"—surrendered *themselves*, consecrated *themselves*, gave their hearts to their "work of faith and labor of love." One has only to name one or two, to be convinced of that. St. Francis, for example; or William Tyndale, to whom—humanly speaking—we owe the English Bible; or William Carey; or David Livingstone; or John Bright; or

Abraham Lincoln. And a whole host of men and women of our own time: like David Lloyd George, of England; or John R. Mott, of this Country; or Miss Grace Dodge who died the other day,—chairman of the National Board of the Young Women's Christian Association and the first woman to serve on the Board of Education of New York City,—of whom it has been said that she gave "regally of her money where first she had given herself."

That is one reason, too, I believe, why a soldier ready for battle appeals to us so strongly. Say what we will about the iniquity and stupidity of war, not one of us but is moved by the sight of a regiment of soldiers armed from top to toe, starting off for the war zone. Why? Because these men are 'giving themselves.' They are not counting their own lives dear unto themselves. They are going to "lay down their own necks" if need be, for Cause or Country.

And if I mistake not, brethren, it is *that* also which explains why most of us have such a warm side to our Mothers. Because they have 'given themselves' for us—body and soul. Yes, I say, body and soul. For you know that the best kind of mother will sacrifice anything and everything for the sake of her children: her health, her time, her social pleasures and her social prestige, and her very reputation.

We often hear of the large part which the Personal Equation plays in human intercourse and human achievement. And, indeed, it is wonderful—the added touch of Individuality—the added touch of Life. The presence or absence of that touch makes all the difference in the world. A man may give all sorts of things and all

sorts of large amounts of money—for the very best of causes; but somehow, if his heart is not going with his gifts, his giving does not appeal to us. He is only giving of his “abundance” (or “superfluity”), as Jesus phrased it. Isn’t that just what St. Paul meant when he said, in the wonderful XIIIth Chapter of his First Letter to these same Corinthians, “Though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not Love, it profiteth me nothing.” ‘Feeding the poor’ is a splendid thing; and fleshy self-denial—or even self-inflicted pain to subdue the fleshy appetites—may be an excellent thing. But better far is it to so *love* the poor that all the other points of charity will follow as a matter of course, and to be so enthusiastic for cleanness and efficiency of life that no unworthy indulgence will ever have as much as a place in our thoughts. For, as Russell Lowell has it in his immortal line,

“The gift without the giver is bare.”

You remember the exquisite Old Testament story of Ruth—in the little Book of that name. Here is a short passage from it: “And Naomi said, Turn again, my daughters: why will ye go with me? . . . And they lifted up their voice, and wept . . . : and Orpah kissed her mother-in-law; but Ruth clave unto her. .

. . . And Ruth said, Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go: and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God, my God: where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the Lord do so to me, and more also, if aught but death

part thee and me. . . . So Naomi returned, and Ruth . . . with her." She had 'first given her own self'—that sweet girl of Moab.

And so, now, my friends, I have one or two practical things to say: and I shall say them as simply and directly as possible. . . .

First, I would say, GIVE YOURSELF to *Christ*.

As Frances Havergal's hymn has it,

"Thy life was given for me;
What have I given for Thee?

. . . .
Thou gav'st Thyself for me;
I give myself to Thee."

Remember, it is no more intellectual assent to certain propositions about Christ that is going to save us, that is going to lift us up where we ought to be and bring us to our best. Neither is it our formal adherence to the Christian Society that is going to emancipate us, that is going to free us from our littlenesses and our basenesses and make us strong and glad in the service of the Highest. Neither will a mere negative goodness do,—giving up this and giving up that and keeping ourselves immaculate because the precepts of Christ seem to require it. O no, living in Christ and with Christ and for Christ means far more than any or all of these things. It means "not the mere being good," but "the definite surrender of oneself and one's life at any cost." It means 'losing' oneself to Christ. No half-measures will do. No middle course is either sufficient or satisfying. . . . You know, you may get all sorts of rules for learning to swim; but the one

unfailing rule—beside which the others are little needed —(the one unfailing rule) is, 'Trust yourself to the water and strike out quietly and surely.

O my friends—my young friends especially,—do you know what it means—'giving yourself' to Christ. It is, indeed, just one of those things which cannot easily be told in human words. But I think I know what it means: and I know that it is all confusion and failure and mediocrity—until a fellow has brought himself to say to the Christ, with all his heart,

"Take myself, and I will be
Ever, only, all for Thee."

Then I would say, also, GIVE YOURSELF to *your Friends*. So long as love calculates and prevaricates, it is in a perilous state. And if we are not going to "be ourselves" to our friends, our friendships will soon wither and die. The Book here says, you remember, "A man that hath friends must show himself friendly." And a more modern writer has it on this wise: that no one is worthy to have friends who will not be a friend. And yet another says, "A true friend unbosoms freely." You know what a two-faced person is: and to be two-faced with a friend—with one who really loves you and is planning for your good—is simply frightful. Well, the sure way to avoid anything approaching two-facedness is to 'give yourself'—to keep nothing back.

And, mark you, brethren, we have sundry Friends besides those in human form. Nature—God's out-of-doors—is our Friend, if we will have it so. Good Books are our Friends: as Stevenson says, "When you have read, . . . it is as though you had touched a loyal

hand, looked into brave eyes, and made a noble friend." Music is one of man's best Friends. And your wholesome recreations are good Friends to you. . . . What then? GIVE YOURSELVES to these things. Don't deal with them casually and superficially. Become immersed in them, so as to extract all the blessing and all the inspiration of them.

And so I would say, next, GIVE YOURSELF to your *Work*. Whatever it be, become absorbed in it. Put yourself into it,—your very best, all that you know. Let it be Consecrated Concentration, and Concentrated Consecration.

Here is something to the point, which I came across the other day (it is from a recent issue of *The Missionary Review of the World*). Many years ago, in an old French Church in Berne, a great choir under the famous old leader, Father Reichel, was having its final rehearsal for the production of the *Messiah*. The chorus had triumphantly sung through to the place where the soprano solo takes up the refrain, "I know that my Redeemer liveth." The singer was a beautiful woman, whose voice had been faultlessly trained. As the tones came out high and clear, the listeners were filled with wonder at her perfect technique. Her breathing was faultless; her note-placing perfect; her enunciation beyond criticism. After the final note there was a pause, and all eyes were turned toward the old conductor to catch his look of approval. Great was the surprise, however, when a sharp tap of the baton was heard, as a command for the orchestra to pause, and with a look of sorrow Father Reichel said to the singer: "My

daughter, you do not really know that your Redeemer liveth, do you?" With a flushed face she replied: "Why yes, I think I do." "Then sing it," he cried, "Sing it from your heart. Tell it to me so that I and all who hear you will know, and know that you know the joy and power of it." Then with an imperious gesture he motioned for the orchestra to go over it again. This time the young woman sang with no thought of herself or of technique or applause from her hearers. She sang the truth that she knew in her heart and experienced in her life, and that she wished to send home to the hearts of the listeners. As the last notes died away there was no wonder at the craftsman's work, but there were quickened hearts that had been moved by the glorious message they had received. And as the singer stood forgetful of applause, the old master stepped up and with tears in his eyes kissed her on her forehead and said: "You do know, for you have told me"!

But, you may say, that was artistic work—fine work—the kind of work that is calculated, if any kind of work is, to draw out one's best. Well, friends, did I not read, also just the other day, of a laborer who was digging away as hard as he could in a dirty swampy piece of ground—and singing the while he was digging. A passer-by asked him how he could contrive to sing at such grimy work as that: when he replied, "Isn't it my daily work that *keeps the light in my mother's face?*"

Just so, my friends, you will never do anything that is worth while in a way that is worth while, unless you put yourself into it, unless you are willing to make sacrifices all along the line, unless you make up your mind

that in every detail the thing demands your very best. As Newman has said, "We are most ourselves when we lose sight of ourselves. . . . When we surrender ourselves we are victors." A chief reason why there is so much miserable mediocrity in the world is just that so many people are not 'first giving their own selves' to their appointed lifework: and I know mighty well what I am talking about.

There are two passages in the Book of Nehemiah that always occur to my mind in connection with this subject. The first is this: "But their nobles put not their necks to the work of the Lord." And the second is this: "And all the wall was joined together. . . . : for the people had a mind to work." . . .

And, brethren, if I have said, Give Yourself to your Work; shall I not say, of the Work of the Kingdom in particular, GIVE YOURSELF to *that* work. Not just your occasional attendance—or, if it be so, your regular attendance—at the Church Services, and your pledged contributions and so forth: but YOURSELF,—your best energies and your best powers of mind and heart. A 'shirker' is a hopeless monstrosity in the Church of the Living Redeemer: while, let me tell you, those who are giving themselves to the study and the service of the Church of Christ (and I am not talking, meantime, of the ministers)—those who are putting heart and mind and substance into it "con amore"—are, far and away, the wholesomest and happiest people I know.

There, then was the secret of the contagious labors and the contagious liberality of a group of first-century Christians: "They . . . first gave their own selves to the Lord." And the secret is precisely the same *today*.

XXI

'FAITH DIVERSIFIED BY DOUBT'

"Lord, I believe: help Thou mine unbelief."—MARK IX,
24.

WE have seen, from our New Testament reading this morning, by whom and in what circumstances these words were first spoken. It seems to me, however, that they are not by any means out of date, and that they suit every single one of us. In some degree we all "believe"—we all have faith. But our belief is more or less flecked with unbelief. We are living—most of us, anyhow, are living—what Browning calls a life "of faith diversified by doubt." Our faith is not by any means complete and perfect. "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

You remember how the Apostles' Creed puts "I believe in the forgiveness of sins" *after* "I believe in the communion of saints." After, not before: as if to imply that those who may fairly claim to belong to the Communion of Saints are liable to fall into sin, and so to need forgiveness. That is true to experience. And similarly those who can honestly say, "I believe: I believe in God, I believe in Jesus Christ, I believe in the Spiritual World, I believe in the worth of the human soul, I believe in the best"—those who can honestly say, "I believe" are not exempt from the suggestions and the subtleties and the depressions and the ensnarements of unbelief. The life of Faith is not all plain sailing. There are occasional

storms. There are treacherous currents. There are hidden rocks. And St. Paul speaks in one place, you remember, of those who "concerning faith have made shipwreck."

Now, friends, once for all will you understand that I am not speaking specifically this morning of our documentary Faith, of those stereotyped statements of Christian belief which we find in our creeds and catechisms. I will yield to no man in respect for these documents, and in admiration of some of them. What I have in mind, however, this morning is the working Faith—the everyday faith—of the average man; or, perhaps I should say, of the average Christian. Not the Faith which is an intellectual assent to a series of propositions; but the Faith which is "a sentiment, for it is a hope; . . . an instinct, for it precedes all outward instruction." The Faith which, as I have already hinted, we all have and hold-to, however feebly and faultily at times.

Yes, we all have it—less or more. Indeed, we all must have it, less or more. We can't get along without it. "Without faith," it has been said, "a man can do nothing. . . . The need of faith never leaves us." Ay, "the need of faith" never leaves us: but sometimes the thing itself is like to leave us, and we are moved to say, "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief."

And, my friends, will you not agree with me that, in these very days of ours, men and women are becoming more and more persuaded of "the need of faith:" nay more, that they *are* actually believing more, and believing more earnestly and more cordially—believing in the

best things—believing in the spiritual valuation of life? We want to believe—these days. We want to have Faith: “the reasonable faith of resolute and open-eyed men;” the sort of Faith which will “remove mountains” of difficulty, which will see good back of all evil, and which will make each new day a day of spiritual achievement and a day of joy.

There are many signs that it is so. There are many indications that men, today, are very serious in ‘feeling after God;’ that they are looking very earnestly at “the things which are not seen”—but eternal; that they are taking a spiritual view of life. In so much that some one has said, quite recently, “the spiritual tide is rising.”

Some years ago Dr. Henry Van Dyke issued a little book called “The Gospel for an Age of Doubt.” Well, it has been suggested (and wisely, too, I think) that the book for today would be “The Gospel for an Age of Desire.” Precisely so. Men, it is true, are not done with their doubts; and never will be on this side of time. But today, it seems, they are desiring more and more to have their doubts disciplined, and desiring—if it may be—to increase and abound in faith. Indeed many of us are coming to feel the truth of what Phillips Brooks once said,—that “to believe much, and not to believe little, is the privilege and glory of a full-grown man.” And so we keep saying, “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.”

Then, is it not the fact that the leading philosophers of today are overwhelmingly spiritual in the trend of their thinking: such men as Eucken and Bergson, and Royce and Bosanquet? Not to speak of the writers of the edi-

torials and the other principal articles in our best periodicals. Yes, the spiritual note—the note of Faith—is sounding strong these days. No doubt about it. We have had, it is true, Nietzsche and Bernhardt on the Continent of Europe,—with their crass materialism and their gospel of brute force. But the naked outcome of that is plain enough over yonder, and our hearts are up in revolt at that whole damnable philosophy of life. Yes, suppose you open, tomorrow, any recent book of consequence, or any magazine of good repute, or almost any decent newspaper; you will find, almost for certain, a striking of the spiritual note and an atmosphere of holy human desire.

Then, again, it is a notorious fact that the Science of today is far less materialistic than it was, say, quarter of a century ago—or even less. "It is simply an impertinence," said an eminent British geologist lately, "(it is simply an impertinence) to say that the leading scientists are irreligious or anti-Christian. Such a statement could only be made by some scatterbrained chatterbox or zealous fanatic." Indeed, brethren, it seems to me that some of the scientists of today are becoming almost alarmingly spiritual; in other words, highly spiritualistic. Anyhow the fact remains that our men of science have largely ceased to construe life exclusively in materialistic terms, and are allowing for the reality of the Spiritual World and the reasonableness and the right of Faith.

Then, I have referred to the European war at present raging. Any evidence there—do you ask—of the 'rising of the spiritual tide?' O yes, certainly. For I am persuaded, to begin with, that the vast majority of the

people of these belligerent Powers feel that the whole thing is diabolically wicked, is entirely out of harmony with the ideals of the twentieth century, is an insult to the present-day Faith of Civilized Humanity. . . .

And what are we thinking and saying about it all, over here? Are we not being aroused to a new enthusiasm for righteousness, to a new preference for the Spirit of Christ and the principles of the Christian Gospel? And, are we not being moved to a great heart-searching—moved to say within ourselves, “Yes, we believe: but, in practice after all, we have been giving too large a place to our unbelief—to our doubts and to our cynicism and to our materialism: we have been, in short, largely living as if we did not believe. We must be more worthy of our heritage of faith. We must be more worthy of our best convictions. ‘Lord, we believe; help Thou our unbelief?’ ”

O yes, my friends, we all know well enough that it is the men and women of *Faith* that we are ready to pin *our faith* to: those who “dream dreams” of things worth while and “see visions” of good overcoming evil: those who believe in God and in Humanity, and who “love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity” and are prepared to try His way at all hazards. Yes, I say, *these* are the men and women whom in our heart of hearts we respect and admire, and whose very Faith we “covet earnestly.” . . .

How then (let us now ask)—how then are we to cut out, more and more, our faithlessness, and to ensure that our Faith be ‘increased?’ “Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.”

I

First of all, I would say, *Don't be discouraged.*

In most of us there is a considerable mixture of belief and unbelief. That is no crime; albeit unfortunate and damaging.

Consequently the Word of God here is wonderfully considerate in this matter. The case of this man in the Gospels, for instance, is verily *for our sake*. You know how Christ dealt with him. He granted his request. He gave him his desire. And, presumably, He did 'help his unbelief'; the man having been frank enough to acknowledge his limitations.

There you are, then. You need not pretend to a faith which you do not possess. Be quite frank in the matter. Go on with what faith you have, and the "increase" will come. Our Father in heaven does not demand of us a full and perfect faith: He asks just so much faith as will draw us to Him to help out what we have,—“Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief.”

II

Next, I would say, We shall do well to *put ourselves in the way* of acquiring a fuller and firmer and finer Faith. As St. Paul says, “Faith cometh by hearing.”

It has been remarked, indeed, that “faith is the heritage of the individual at birth; . . . it is an instinct.” Yes, there is a certain proportion of faith born in us, just as there is a certain proportion of intelligence born in us. But it requires to be cultivated, just as the other requires

to be cultivated. We can't expect it to grow and to prosper by magic, any more than we can expect either the physique or the intellect of a child to grow without the proper care—without nourishment (material and mental).

What then? Let us put ourselves in the way of what will help our Faith, not hinder it. There are the right sort of books to read and the right sort of men and women to make companions of. Above all, there are the interpretation-of-life and the-vision-of-human-uplift and the-truth-of-the-Universal-Fatherhood-of-God which Jesus has given us, and which, if we hold to them, will make our Faith rich and warm.

If you wish to get from here to New York City, you do not make for Chicago. Even so, when you pray, "Lord, . . . help Thou mine unbelief," you must make the prayer intelligently and purposefully, and set your face in the right direction. Or, to quote St. Paul again, "Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, . . . lovely, . . . of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise; *think on these things.*"

"I being in the way, the Lord led me."

"They shall ask the way to Zion, with their faces thitherward."

III

Next, I would say, Be wise enough and wary enough to keep in mind that *Faith is not always an easy thing to hold.*

Doesn't the Book here speak of "the . . . fight of

faith," and "the trial of . . . faith," and so on?

O yes, "there are many adversaries." There are all sorts of things that seem to say "No" to our deepest convictions and our best beliefs and our holiest hopes.

To say the least of it, we need to be on our guard. And sometimes we need to strike at the "adversaries,"—to strike at the cynicism and the sensualism which are subversive of all faith.

Consequently we read here about "putting on the breast-plate of Faith," and "taking the shield of Faith, . . .

. . . and the sword of the Spirit." And, writing to one of the Churches, St. Paul commends his readers for 'the steadfastness of their Faith.'

Yes, we've got to "keep a goin'." About sixty years ago Henry Rogers published his "Eclipse of Faith:" a most suggestive and helpful book in its time,—and it would be so were it read today. Anyhow the title of the book is significant—"The Eclipse of Faith." For, verily, our best beliefs are sometimes eclipsed—darkened out of all recognition: our belief in God, our belief in Human Nature, our belief in the ultimate triumph of truth and goodness. But we have seen eclipses of the moon; and we know that the moon emerges from her eclipse—how? By preserving her proper motion—by keeping a-going. Which thing is an allegory, and suits our case.

IV

And so I would say, next, Don't forget that *Faith requires exercise*.

"Faith without works is dead," says St. James, you

remember. And we read, also, here, of "the work of Faith with power," of "the obedience of Faith," of "the sacrifice and service of . . . Faith;" and so forth.

It is said that sailors, by using their eyes to sight land or to sight other vessels at sea or to sight dangers ahead, acquire unusual keenness of sight. Even so, the eye of faith is strengthened by exercise. "The life which I now live in the flesh I *live by the faith* of the Son of God."

There you have it. Live in the inspiration of your best beliefs. Do your daily work, converse with your fellow-men, live your home-life, deal with your children, deal with everybody in the inspiration of your best beliefs. And, not least important, take active part in the "work of faith" which the Church of Christ and its allied institutions are essaying to do. And, as sure as the sunrise, your doubts and misgivings will become fewer, your depressions will mostly disappear, and you will begin to "abound in Faith."

Yes, the best cure for unbelief is action. Work for the best, and you will believe in the best.

V

Never forgetting, in all your wholesome Christian activities, (never forgetting) that "*Faith . . . worketh by love.*"

O yes, it is Love that "beareth all things, *believeth* all things, hopeth all things."

So long as we think and live within our own narrow spheres, so long as we keep ourselves closely and selfishly to ourselves, our best beliefs have a poor chance: they are

apt, so, to shrivel up and die. But once we catch the contagion of the Spirit of Christ, once we learn to go out of ourselves and to 'spend and be spent' in trying to make this world purer and brighter and kindlier, our faith becomes emancipated and refreshed and we are on the way to have "joy and peace in believing."

Yes, after all has been said, Love is the master-key to the situation. For "Love never faileth."

These two, then, are companion prayers:—

Lord, make us "to increase and abound in *love* one toward another, and toward all men;" and, Lord, "increase our *faith*."

XXII

ABIDING WEALTH

“ . . . *rich toward God.*”—LUKE XII, 21.

“**R**ICH toward God!” That is to say, rich in God’s estimate—rich according to His way of accounting—rich in the things that are worth while and abiding and God-approved.

Yes, *that* is to be wealthy indeed,—rich in those things which “neither moth nor rust doth corrupt” and which “thieves” may not “steal.”

The truth is, brethren, our ideas of *wealth* are almost wholly materialistic. We count a man rich, who is a moneyed man, or who has real estate or some other kind of this world’s gear in great plenty. But the New Testament has wonderfully little to say about that sort of wealth; except, for the most part, to pity it and to point out its dangers. It is a different conception of wealth altogether that you get *here*. “I know thy . . . poverty,” says the message in the Book of Revelation to the Church in Smyrna—a much persecuted Church and far from being a wealthy Church—, “I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty; (but thou art rich),” adds the Voice in an arresting and illuminating parenthesis. “But thou art rich!” What did that mean? Why, it meant—surely—that (spite of their “tribulation and poverty”) those people were “rich toward God:” that they were aboundingly devout and courageous and loyal-to-truth-

and-duty and ready to be "faithful unto death." "Ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ," writes St. Paul, you remember, "(ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ), that, though He was rich, yet for your sakes He became poor." Ay, but it is implied all through, and it is the simple fact, that the Christ was never richer than when He 'laid down His life,'—was never richer in compassion and in influence and in tokens of the Father's approval:

"Did e'er such love and sorrow meet,
Or thorns compose so *rich a crown!*"

So that in His case the old prophetic word had a remarkable kind of fulfilment, "And He made His grave . . . with the rich in His death."

There are quite a few things that money cannot buy. There are three things, in particular, that money cannot buy: health, brains, and salvation. No doubt a large bank account may enable a man to procure the very best medical service or to make his way to the very finest of climates,—and so forth: but, after all has been said, you cannot buy health. No doubt, also, the moneyed man may buy books and may take advantage of educational opportunities which are closed to those of limited means, and so forth: but, after all has been said, you cannot buy brains, and, in point of fact, some of the world's greatest thinkers and greatest writers and greatest artists and greatest statesmen have been poor—or next door to it. And, as for buying salvation—as for purchasing emancipation of soul and purity of heart and largeness of mind and rectitude and usefulness of life, and a safe convoy to the Better Country, *that* is entirely out of the question:

"for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast."

Then—thank God—there are some things that lack-of-money cannot deprive us of: some mind-and-heart riches of which poverty cannot bankrupt us.

"He'll hae misfortunes great an' sma',"
 said Robert Burns of himself—as if prophetically,
 "He'll hae misfortunes great an' sma',"
 "But ay a heart aboon them a'."

Yes, *that* is one kind of wealth that the very poorest of the poor may possess, and may possess securely and abidingly: the "unconquerable soul"—a heart of good cheer.

"Our greatest yet with least pretence, . . .

"Rich in saving common-sense,"

wrote Tennyson of the Duke of Wellington. *That* is another kind of wealth that may consort with scanty means: common-sense. To have it is to be able to live richly: not to have it is to be mighty poor.

Then, to be sure, you do not require to be passing rich in order to breathe God's fresh air, or in order to enjoy the smell of the newly-turned earth in Spring, or in order to reciprocate the sparkling courtesy of the stars. "My neighbor may have abundance of riches; but he is no nearer the stars than I am." And, I have one or two friends and one or two accomplishments which, I fully think, I would not exchange for all the money in the Empire State. "Wherefore do ye spend money . . . and your labour for that which satisfieth not?"

Truly, my friends, in the enjoyment of life's *best* gifts "the rich and poor meet together: the Lord is the maker

of them all."

Suppose we ask, now, a little more in detail just what it is to be "rich toward God?" And for a little chain of answers to that question—both the suggestions and the phrasing of them—let us keep to the Bible: we can't do better.

First of all, then, you read in the Epistle of James as follows, "Hath not God chosen the poor of this world *rich in faith*, and heirs of the kingdom. . . . ?"

"Rich in *Faith!*" That, in good sooth, is to dwell in "a wealthy place." To be incredulous, to be sceptical, to be without the vision and verve and vigor of Faith is to be a very poor sort of human. It is to be mentally and spiritually bankrupt; and, in respect of enterprise, resourceless. But, on the other hand, to believe in God,—that HE is before all things and back of all things, All-powerful and All-wise and All-loving; to believe in Jesus Christ,—in His way of thinking and living and in the persuasions of His Spirit and the power and promise of His grace; to believe in ourselves as the children of God and the 'captains of our souls;' to believe in "the other fellow" as a fellow to be encouraged and befriended; and to believe in "the ultimate decency of things," and that

"There was never winter

But brought the spring;"—

why, *that* is to live a full, rich life. Yes truly, my friends, it is faith, not finances, that enables us to live both restfully and royally. You remember how the rich young ruler "went away sorrowful" from Jesus and His

tender invitation,—how he “went away sorrowful; for he had great possessions.” It was his very “possessions” that stood in the way of his peace and made him a poor man.

And, my friends, let me tell you this: no matter how materially prosperous a whole People may be—as the People of this Country are prospering today—, if they are not “rich in faith” their prosperity will be but a snare to them. It will mean pride, and pleasure running riot, and probably also war-fever. And, “where there is no vision, the people perish.” I like especially these two lines from our national hymn:

“Long may our land be bright

“With freedom’s holy light.”

Not ‘freedom’s hilarious glitter;’ but “freedom’s holy light!”

Next, doesn’t St. Paul speak of God being “*rich in mercy*”? Another most enviable—another imperishable—type of wealth! But not necessarily confined to the Father Himself: for the Master says, “Be ye therefore merciful, as your Father also is merciful.”

“Rich in Mercy:” in thoughtfulness, in compassion, in kindness, in forbearance; rich in the gifts of encouragement and good cheer. What winsome wealth!—

“It is twice blest;

“It blesseth him that gives and him that takes.”

No doubt about the ‘richness’ of God’s Mercy: but what of ours, my friends? Let me commend to you a great passage from one of Emerson’s great Essays (his Essay on “Manners”): “What *is* rich?” he asks, “Are you rich enough to help anybody? to succour the unfashionable and

the eccentric? rich enough to make . . . the itinerant with his consul's paper which commends him "To the charitable," the swarthy Italian with his few broken words of English, the lame pauper hunted by overseers from town to town, even the poor insane or besotted wreck of man or woman, feel the noble exceptions of your presence and your house, from the general bleakness and stoniness; to make such feel that they were greeted with a voice which made them both remember and hope?

. . . Without the rich heart, wealth is an ugly beggar." . . . "Are you rich enough to help anybody?" and, "the rich heart!" Can you beat that? Rich in money is nothing compared with being "rich in Mercy."

Next, do we not read, in the Book of Proverbs, "He becometh poor that dealeth with a slack hand: but the hand of the diligent maketh rich?" Another type of God-approved wealth,—*Diligence*.

That a man is well-off does not necessarily imply either that he has been a niggard or that he has been a knave. In many cases—perhaps in the vast majority of cases—it just implies that he has been diligent, "not slothful in business." We are sometimes amazed at the large sums of money which some individuals can command for a single evening's work: the great musicians, for instance, like Paderewski and Caruso, and even Harry Lauder with his contagious nonsense, and others. Yes, but our amazement would be somewhat lessened, if we only knew the amount of hard work which such individuals have put in. And mark you this, the things that *seem* to come most spontaneously and most easily from the great artists are,

not seldom, the very things that have cost the most thought and the most toil.

My friends—my young friends especially—, if you wish to work your way to wealth (and there will be no dishonor in that, provided you are minded to acquire your wealth fairly and to use it Christianly)—if you wish to work your way to wealth, be sure of this: that Diligence is essential, that you will have to get down to business and stay there. Remember that, as some one has said, “the world is looking for the man who can do something; not for the man who can ‘explain’ why he didn’t do it:” also that “it’s no use to wait for our ship to come in unless we have sent one out.”

But, brethren, with material wealth as the outcome of it or otherwise, the “diligent” life is the “rich” life—“rich toward God.” For, do you know what the word “diligence” literally means? It means something more and better than just plodding along at your work as a matter of stark obligation. The word comes from a Latin word meaning ‘to choose.’ So that to be “diligent” means taking to your appointed tasks as if they were matters of choice—‘labors of love:’ and so, putting your whole soul into them, putting your best into them. *That* will make your life rich,—no matter how little you actually earn. “The hand of the diligent maketh rich.”

Next, doesn’t St. Paul write, in his First Epistle to Timothy, “Charge them that are rich in this world, .

. . . that they do good, that they be *rich* in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate?” “Rich in *Good Works!*” Another fine type of wealth.

"Ready to distribute, willing to communicate." Yes, we may say that "a man is rich in proportion to the number of things he can let alone"—the number of things he can give away and do without. Paderewski, the great pianist, had, until quite recently, ample means. He had a house in Paris, a chateau in Switzerland, and sundry "expensive habits and hobbies." But he has been so touched by the sufferings of his countrymen in Poland, that he has parted with practically his whole fortune in their behalf, and is now about to go on tour again to 'make a living' (as he himself has phrased it). Well, I will say that Paderewski was never a "richer" *man* than he is today—with his big fortune renounced for love's sake and for his home-land's sake. Sir Walter Scott, the wizard of the pen, was never a "richer" man than the day he was financially ruined: for he straightway "marched breast forward" and proceeded to do the greatest work of his life.

Brethren, if we *will* worship Wealth, let it be the Wealth that counts with God,—wealth of courage, wealth of self-renunciation. And, if we *will* be "rich," let it be "rich in good works."

Then, again, there is a very remarkable kind of Richness "toward God" of which the New Testament speaks: where it says, "as poor, yet making many rich." The wealth of *Enriching Service*.

And by that, my friends, I mean not simply, as I have been saying already this morning, giving of our substance to help; but giving *ourselves*—our whole soul's influence—so as, if it may be, to enrich other people's souls, to

give them a new hold of God and new heart of grace through the friendship of Christ and a new outlook upon life. Some one has said that there are individuals who, by their presence and their wisdom and their loftiness of tone, create in their fellow-mortals "a new consciousness of wealth, by opening their eyes to unobserved advantages,"—and (I should like to add) by opening their eyes to the blessing and beauty of the Gospel of Christ. Now, *that* is "making . . . rich." That is the wealth of Enriching Service, where, blessed as it is to "receive," it is even "more blessed to give." And, we don't require money to excel along that line. No, nor brilliant intellects either. No, nor conspicuous social position either. A pure and loving heart and a kindly hand and spontaneity and frankness—in a word, being our best selves—is all that is needed. "As poor, yet making many rich."

And of course, my friends, the crowning instance of this wealth of Enriching Service is our Lord Jesus Christ Himself,—“Who, for the joy that was set before Him, endured the cross, despising the shame.” What “joy that was set before Him?” Not just the “joy” of returning to the Father’s nearer presence and resuming His place of distinction and glory; but, I take it, the “joy” of making His brethren of mankind free and glad and worthy-of-their-heavenly-citizenship. Yes, “as poor, yet making many rich:” and therefore *not* “poor” after all, but rich beyond all computation in being the incomparable ‘Helper and Friend’ of Humanity.

And then, my friends, I wish to close by reminding

you of one other saying of the great Book: "The blessing of the Lord, *it* maketh rich."

"*The blessing of the Lord!*" What does *that* mean? Well, it is indescribable. Most certainly it does not mean merely a series of strokes of good luck. No, no: it means far more—far better—than that. It means Inspiration. It means the purifying, and the chastening, and the deepening, and the gladdening of one's whole life. If, then, my friend, you have reason to be persuaded that God is really "blessing" you—in whatever way and by whatever unlikely-looking means—, then you have equal reason to insist that *you*, for one, are a wealthy soul—"rich toward God."

XXIII

SONGS IN THE NIGHT

(CHRISTMAS, 1915)

"God my Maker, who giveth songs in the night."—JOB XXXV, 10.

EVERY now and then, in this Book of books, you come upon a passage or a phrase which stands there in its own right, so to speak. I mean that, in order to appreciate the truth of it and the poetry of it and the comfort of it and the inspiration of it, you do not of necessity have to study the whole chapter or paragraph in which it stands. Such is the part sentence I have taken for my text this morning,—*"God . . . Who giveth songs in the night."* No matter what precise point Elihu means to make here in the Book of Job, his phrase "songs in the night" arrests us at once, and is for all time.

Nay more, although it stands in the pre-Christian book of Job, this phrase is, in essence and import, a New Testament phrase—a Christian phrase ("songs in the night"). For one of the most distinctive and distinguishing things about Christianity is just the wonders it can accomplish in unlikely places, and at unlikely times, and with unlikely things, and through unlikely people. "Songs in the night",—Gospel music in the time of darkness and uncertainty and fear.

It is precisely this idea that lies back of such Scripture

sayings about the Almighty Father as His 'furnishing a table in the wilderness,' and His 'turning the rock into a standing water, and the flint into a fountain of waters', and His making 'the desert blossom as the rose', and His bringing a Saviour out of unlikely conditions—like "a root out of a dry ground." And it is the same idea that is embedded in such Apostolic passages as these:—"As sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things"; and, "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong."

Yes, the "night" may be ever so dark, or ever so long, or ever so eerie, or ever so stormy. It may, in short, be as unpropitious for music and as hostile to song as we could well imagine. Still the God, Whose are both summer and winter and both south and north and both day and night, "giveth songs in the night",—music in the most unlikely circumstances: the music of faith and hope and love,—the music of Gospel cheer.

Are we not commemorating the fact, these very days, that it was while shepherds were "keeping watch over their flock *by night*" that the Christ of God was ushered into this world? Yes, "by night" in more senses than one. Literally "by night": when all was dark, and the folk of the Northern hemisphere were asleep. In a dark and obscure corner of the world, too: in "little, obscure Bethlehem" of "little, obscure Judea." In one of the night seasons of human history, too: when people were groping their way

by the dim light of uncertain faiths, and when the state of society was unusually confused and chaotic. . . . And then, to whom were the "good tidings of great joy" first announced in song? To a band of humble shepherds, half-shivering at their commonplace task: so that "the very birth-hour of Christianity irradiated the humble doings of humble people", and for all time "common work was encircled with an immortal crown."

"O little town of Bethlehem,
How still we see thee lie;
Above thy deep and dreamless sleep
The silent stars go by:
Yet in thy dark streets shineth
The Everlasting light. . . ."

What a distinction for "little Bethlehem" that night,—God's love made articulate in song! What a distinction for that night of all the nights of all the years,—that just that night came the immortal song of Human Redemption! What a distinction for any night-season of human doubt and sorrow,—that God may lighten it to joy and touch it to immortality with the music of the Gospel! "God our Maker, Who giveth songs in the night."

"The Lord will command His loving kindness in the daytime, and in the night His song shall be with me: . . . I call to remembrance my song in the night." Ah yes, my friends, what wonderful messages of grace, what refreshments of spirit, what healings and heartenings have come to many of us in the 'night seasons' of our lives—in our times of deprivation and disappointment! One of last century's poets, whose verse is not so well

known as it should be, (I mean, Lewis Morris) says very beautifully that

“Only Suffering draws

“The inner heart of song, and can elicit

“The perfumes of the soul.”

And surely, my friends, it is the indisputable fact that, but for the shadows and thwartings of the great souls of humanity, more than half of the finest music we have would never have been forthcoming, and more than half of the most inspiring sermons that have been preached would never have been even conceived, and more than half of the greatest books that have enriched and cheered humanity—from old Homer to Robert Louis Stevenson and Sidney Lanier of our own time—would never have seen the light of day. Why, you have only to mention the names of, say, the first score of the greatest humans known to us—in literature or in art or in national leadership—to be convinced that it is only “through much tribulation” that the “helpers and friends of mankind” enter into their “kingdom” of character and influence and fame. There are, for example Milton in literature, and Beethoven in art, and Lincoln in national leadership: men of many sorrows. . . . But we do not need to go to men and women of distinction to be convinced of this thing—convinced that “God . . . giveth songs in the night.” For surely there is not a single one of us who has really lived, who has not heard the music of God in our dark hours and in our trial times, and who is not able to say that these “songs in the night” have been more wonderful and more inspirational than any songs of the day or any martial music of prosperity! . . .

“And there were . . . shepherds . . . keeping watch over their flocks *by night*. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and . . . said . . . , Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy . . . And . . . there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God.” Astronomers tell us, you know, that most of the “fixed” stars (as we call them) are travelling through space at an incredible speed. Be that as it may, it is practically certain that the same stars are shining down on us these nights of the twentieth century that shone down upon the shepherds the first Christmas Eve. Even so, my friends, the same music of the Gospel, the same ‘song in the night,’ the same Christmas message, the same CHRIST comes to us today that came to Bethlehem full nineteen hundred years ago,—for “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and today, and for ever.” Yes, it is there all the time,—wave upon wave of holy and heartening music—“The Night Song of Bethlehem.” True, we may not be hearing the angels sing as the shepherds heard them. Nay more, we may not be heeding the music of the Gospel as it has often been heeded in days gone by. But, notwithstanding our dullness and our deadness—and notwithstanding our absorption in mere things—and notwithstanding our querulousness and our quarrelsomeness, the music of the Gospel is there all the while and the angels keep on singing:

“And still their heavenly music floats

O'er all the weary world:

Above its sad and lowly plains

They bend on hovering wing,

And ever o'er its Babel sounds
The blessed angels sing."

If we don't hear them, it is not their fault: it is our fault.

Ay, but let me tell you, friends, there are many who *are hearing* the angels sing these days, who are detecting the "songs in the night," who are tracing streaks of light and notes of hope and promise in the confusion of these very days in which there is so much that is of the night—dark and eerie and fearsome. I have been reading, lately, quite a little about the Christmas message and the Christmas mirth in view of the world situation today; and nothing has impressed me more, in all I have read, than the hopefulness of it all and the confident assumption that, ere very long, a new appreciation of the Gospel of Christ and a new awakening to its fundamental claims are going to bring order and peace out of all this confusion. O yes, my friends, be you sure the music of the Gospel is the only thing that will do it. Nearly everything else has been tried, and has been found a failure. Culture has but sufficed, for the most part, to make men proud and overbearing. Science has but sufficed, for the most part, to provide us with instruments of espionage and destruction. Art has been sneered-at as not for fighting times, and its treasures have been despised and destroyed without a tremor of shame. Diplomacy is, apparently, futile. It remains yet, then, for the Christian Gospel of Good-Will to be tried. Yes, I say, to be tried; for, if it be said that Christianity also, like Culture and Science and Diplomacy, has failed so far, it is because—as a famous American once said—it "has not been tried."

O, but there are scores of people all over the earth today who have tried CHRIST, and who are trying CHRIST; and who are not being disappointed in Him. In how many territories, in how many homes, in how many hearts there is, we should be inclined to say, mighty little music these Christmas Days of 1915! By reason of sickness, by reason of business depression and ill-luck, by reason of bereavement, by reason of the bloody ravages of war, and what not, the light has gone out—we should say—in many places, and it is night in many human souls. Ay, but the Master Musician can still provide these stricken souls with melodies of grace, and scores of them are singing their “songs in the night.”

Have I said that our text this morning reminds us that one of the distinctions of Christianity is its knack and power of bringing brightness and beauty and beneficence out of unlikely places and through unlikely people? Yes, not a few of those who have conceived and commenced and in part conducted some of the greatest movements of history have been men and women of no conspicuous position: deemed faddists and what not (as Christ Himself was) by the severely practical and the worldly-wise. As Robert Louis Stevenson says somewhere, “The time would fail me if I were to recite all the names in history whose exploits are perfectly irrational and even shocking to the business mind”. We have been poking fun—most of us (I plead guilty myself)—we have been poking fun at Mr. Henry Ford’s amateur Peace Expedition. Well, it is, to say the least of it, a venture of faith; and, it being so, we should treat it with courtesy. Moreover, that civilian ven-

ture is a protest against the ineptitude of diplomacy and officialdom to even negotiate for peace—let alone secure it: and, as I have lived the greater part of my life in the atmosphere of officialdom and militarism which envelopes Europe, I would say, with all my heart and in the strongest way I can, God keep this Country from generating a similar atmosphere,—for it is stifling and poisonous. Remember, it was no other than George Washington who said, in one of his latest addresses to the people of this Country, “Avoid overgrown military establishments, which are particularly hostile to republican liberties.” And, in regard to all such ventures of faith as the Ford Peace Expedition, let us remember that wonderful Old Testament saying, “Thou didst well in that it was in thine heart”; and that other Scripture saying (New Testament and Apostolic), “Therefore judge nothing before the time.” Besides, even when our ventures of faith apparently fail, let us bear in mind that, as George Eliot says, “failure after . . . perseverance is much grander than never to have had a striving good enough to be called a failure.” . . . “Songs in the night!” Yes, at the touch of the Spirit and the power of Christ the unlikely does happen sometimes: witness the marvellous growth of Christianity itself from the most minute and obscure and despised beginnings. “For who hath despised the day of small things?” . . .

My friends, does it seem to any of you today as if the Peace Song of the angels had been forever silenced,—forever lost in the black night of human treachery and strife and race-hatred and blatant and blazing warfare? If such

is your thought, will you just think of these two things?

In the first place, will you bear in mind that, with remarkably little difference, "it was into just such a world as this, a world ruled by the iron hand . . . divided by class hatreds, oppressed by tyranny and greed, filled with murder and pride and lust—(it was into just such a world as this) that the Divine Child came. . . . It was because the world was such a world that Immanuel came." If ever the Gospel was needed, it was then. And, if ever the Gospel was needed, *it is now*.

And so, my friends, if, today, we cannot sing the Christmas song of 'Peace on earth,—goodwill among men'—if we cannot sing that song with the assurance that it is true today and amply fulfilled, let us at least sing it with the assurance that it is *needed* today as almost never before. For "the darker the day, the more we must pray." Ay, and the darker the night, the more we have need of the music of God, "Who giveth songs in the night."

And, for a second thing—and a last thing this morning—will you take this with you? There is a passage in one of the Gospels which tells us that, when at one time Jesus sought retirement "and would have no man know it," He was followed after all, and discovered; for "He could not be hid." And there is an old English legend to the effect that the bells of buried Churches—Churches long disused and crumbled to pieces and their stones all but covered out of sight by the accumulated soil of the centuries—that the bells of these buried Churches may always be heard on Christmas Eve. Even so, brethren, our Christian ideals and our Christian purposes, and the appeals of the Christ for human rectitude and human brotherhood and love,

may seem, time and again, to be buried out of all sight and out of all memory. But, at such a season as this (our blessed Christmastide), our ears are surprised by the call of these buried things, and we hear again the appeal of the CHRIST—the pleadings of the King of Love. Yes, indeed, “Christmas will survive this war”: for Christmas means “the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

XXIV
THE CHILDREN
(CHILDREN'S DAY)

"And He took a child, and set him in the midst."—MARK IX, 36.

THE Child in the midst! What a splendid object-lesson! What an irresistible appeal! Better than discourse and book and blackboard all together. For there is nothing so wonderful—there is nothing so full of suggestions and possibilities—as a little child. That little piece of flesh and blood: that young mind: that bud of a soul—about to open to the great wide world of things and of thoughts.

The Child in the midst! One of God's very best gifts. Pity those who do not think so! Not to love children is to stand condemned. To "despise one of these little ones" is inhuman: nay, according to Christ Himself, it is to be in grave danger of being thrust.

"out of the ken of God

"Or care of man, for ever and ever more!" . . .

And so, my friends, you will find that mostly all the great men and women, the big souls, the real benefactors of Humanity have been drawn as by a magnet to the children, and have loved the bairns,—whether they had bairns of their own or not. Ay, and some of the saddest and most thwarted souls of mankind have received half their comfort from the gaiety and grace of the children. "Blessed be childhood," says Amiel (and he was a sad

enough soul), "(blessed be childhood), which brings down something of heaven into the minds of our rough earthliness. . . . Blessed be childhood for the good that it does, and for the good which it brings about carelessly and unconsciously, by simply making us love it and letting itself be loved. What little of Paradise we see still on earth is due to its presence among us." And Robert Louis Stevenson used to say, in the times of his ill-health and uncertain prospects, "I like children better every day, I think, and most other things less. . . . I don't know how to go by them for the love of them, especially the very wee ones."

We are not surprised, then, that JESUS loved the children; that He "took them up in His arms, put His hands upon them, and blessed them;" and that He put them forward, once and again, as the exponents of some of His deepest teaching on the meaning and the mystery of the Kingdom of God on earth. O, how differently we should have thought of the Christ, had we *not* had those fair glimpses of His reverence and love of the little ones! Without those glimpses what a blank there would have been! They bring Him so near us. And they bring the children themselves so near Him. *They* seem to belong to Christ by a special kind of propriety. I can't for the life of me see how anyone can object to Infant Baptism, as it is practised in the vast majority of the Branches of Christ's Church. To my mind, in the light of the Gospel record, it is the most appropriate thing imaginable. "And they brought young children to Jesus, that HE should touch them:" and we know what happened.

The child in the midst! What a challenge! What a clear call to us to realize our responsibilities! There they are—the little lives: needing our protection, needing our leadership, needing our prayers, needing our love . . . There they are, too,—the coming citizens and leaders of the Commonwealth: and they will be in large part what we make them. . . . There they are, too, the future members and supporters of the Christian Church: and they will be in large part what we are. . . . O yes, the children are a great joy; but they are a grim challenge as well. God help those who accept only the joy of it all, while failing to see the challenge of it. For I tell you, brethren, as I look away back upon my own early life, and as I look round about me today, I am more and more convinced that one of the most difficult tasks in life is just the task of ‘training up the children in the way they should go.’ O, it sounds so like a copy-book maxim—that verse of the Book of Proverbs, “Train up a child in the way he should go.” But, in good sooth, it is more than a mere copy-book maxim: it is a stern reality, and requires an amazing amount of both grit and grace. And let me tell you, fathers and mothers,—(and, mark you, a son or daughter can say this with as much right-of-experience and with as much impressiveness as any parent can say it)—well, let me tell you, it will be an awful thing if any of your children shall ever have to say in after life, “Had we been better guided, we should not have made shipwreck of our lives.”

But surely there is a great joy at the heart of the responsibility. Indeed I am prepared to believe that the joy of fatherhood—or of motherhood—is just about the purest

and most substantial happiness that this world holds for us mortals. For is not the highest kind of happiness the happiness which most successfully lifts one out of oneself? And that, I trow, is what the joy of parenthood does.

Yes, what a difference the Child in the house makes! Not simply that there is a deal of noise where there used to be quietness. Nor yet simply that all the household arrangements and household duties seem to centre now around the little one. But rather that, for the parents themselves, the whole perspective of life is altered, and the future all re-mapped and re-colored: especially so in the case of a first-born. Everything is different. . . .

And that, my friends, is what I wish to make most of this morning: not so much what we may do for the children, as what the children may do—and are doing—for us.

The Child in the midst is teaching us all sorts of lessons, and furnishing us with all sorts of inspirations.

How the children appeal to us by their very frolics and make-believes! How they help to keep us human, and to lighten our burdens, and to make many of our anxieties appear ridiculous! No wonder Amiel said, "Blessed be childhood for the good it *does*!"

How they appeal to us, too, by their outright affection! And, just as its homeliest doll is usually the little one's favorite of all its dolls, even so sometimes the most unlikely individuals often taste of a child's affection. I was reading lately about a party of visitors who were going through a State's prison. In the party was a girl of very tender years, who soon became very tired. The officer in charge of the party hailed one of the prisoners, and asked him to carry the child. At the close of the tour of inspec-

tion the child's mother told her to thank the prisoner: which she did—child fashion—by putting her arms round his neck and kissing him. That was too much for the prisoner. He turned his head and hurried away,—the tears rolling down his cheeks. The appeal of love had gone to his heart, and—who knows?—had made a new man of him. For, as the writer of the story adds, "A loving little child is a good deal like the dear Lord Jesus. A loving little child is more like the great God than the rest of us."—"We love Him, because He first loved us."

You know, too, my friends,—many of you—how much the Child in the house means in the day of trouble, very specially in the shadowed hours of bereavement. When the wave which has curled itself up on the rock is pulled back and slips down, it finds another resting-place—the soft sand below. Even so, when some maturer soul who has companioned you for years slips your mortal grasp and you have to let go, thank God if He has left you some slenderer, but no less sincere, affection to rest upon—in the hearts of your children. "And a little child shall lead them."

And then I believe, brethren, it is the Child in the midst who is going to solve a great many of our problems for us: I mean, the prospects of the children of today, the demands of their lives, and our desires for them.

Do you mean to tell me, for instance, that the liquor problem will not be solved when people have once made up their minds whether or not they wish their boys and girls to tamper with alcohol?

And what about the menace of war—the rank idiocy of war? There is, I have been told, a famous picture depict-

ing the departure of a soldier from his home for immediate action on the field. He is in the act of bidding his wife and little girl good-bye; and the little girl is represented as saying to him "Daddy, are you going away to kill some other little girl's daddy?" Why, a scene like that is more eloquent than hundreds of volumes—on the inhumanity of warfare—the ungodliness of it—the very devilishness of it. Yes, because a great nation receives some slight affront, shall it proceed to deprive scores of its own mothers and children and scores of the mothers and children of the other party of their bread-winners? Murder! It is nothing more nor less. And the diplomats don't do the fighting: and the gun-manufacturers pocket the dollars, and chuckle. When are we going to open our eyes and see!

Then, my friends, you have only to read a book like George Eliot's delightful little story "Silas Marner," in order to see how a Child may alter the whole course of a man's life and give a totally new direction to his ambitions,—in order to see that (as Wordsworth says, quoted by Geo. Eliot on the title-page to "Silas Marner"),

"A child, more than all other gifts,

"That earth can offer to declining man,

"Brings hope with it, and forward-looking thoughts."

But here is a more modern instance. It is from a book called, "The Spirit of Youth and the City Streets": written by that remarkable woman, Jane Addams, of Chicago. She gives, there, the following account, without naming him, of "a distinguished labor leader in England."—"His affections had been starved, even as a child, for he knew nothing of his parents, his earliest memories being associated with a wretched old woman, who took the most cas-

ual care of him. When he was nine years old he ran away to sea and for the next seven years led the rough life of a dock laborer, until he became interested in a little crippled boy, who by the death of his father had been left solitary on a freight boat. My English friend promptly adopted the child as his own, and all the questions of life centered about his young protégé. He was constantly driven to attend evening meetings, where he heard discussed those social conditions which bear so hard upon the weak and sick. The crippled boy lived until he was fifteen, and by that time the regeneration of his foster-father was complete,—the young docker was committed for life to the bettering of social conditions. It is doubtful” adds Miss Addams, “(it is doubtful) whether any abstract moral appeal could have reached such a roving nature. . . . Only a pull upon his deepest sympathies and affections, his desire to protect and cherish a weaker thing, could possibly have stimulated him.” . . . Again I would quote the ancient prophet, “A little child shall lead them.”

And to be sure, brethren, we can never forget that, when our Father in heaven wished to reveal Himself to man in all the tenderness of His grace and in all His human-heartedness (if I may put it so), and when He wished to convince us of His interest in every aspect and stage of human life, He brought it to pass that “the Word became flesh” and “Jesus was *born* in Bethlehem.” And if the story of Calvary has been the regeneration of the world, let us remember that we should not have had the story of Calvary had it not been for the story of Bethlehem first.

"A little Child the Saviour came." . . .
"And He took a child, and set him in the midst of them."

My friends, I have another thought to close with to-day. Let us remember that we are observing this as "Children's Day." Why not more regularly 'set the children in the midst' of the Church? They are too little with us here: too little with us, I mean, in the staple services of the Sanctuary—as distinct from the Sunday-School hour. Would that I might see more Children's faces when I came to this desk of a Sunday morning—or evening!

Now, there are two ways of looking at the matter.

One way of looking at it is that, just as a Child has a right to be housed and fed and dressed and educated and so on, even so a Child has a right to the Gospel and the Institutions of the Gospel—a right to the teachings and associations and influences of the Sanctuary. Consequently a parent who does not encourage his children to take advantage of their Gospel rights is as untrue to his trust as a parent who fails to house or feed or dress or educate his children. You can't get past that.

But there is another way of looking at the matter. As I have already said, I am thinking for the most part to-day of what the Children may do for us—if we give them the chance. Just think, then, what the Children might do for us (what, indeed, might they *not* do for us?) if they were with us here Sunday after Sunday with fair regularity and in dozens: and there is no reason why they should not be. I venture to say, they would brighten the worship immensely. They would enliven the praise immensely.

They would cheer the preacher, and improve the preaching immensely. Why, an assembled congregation *without Children* Sunday after Sunday—or with only the merest handful of boys and girls between the ages, say, of eight and eighteen—is an incomplete and incongruous thing altogether. It is like a piece of music with all the parts—except the Melody. Or it is like a portrait on canvass—with the Eyes left out. O yes, with all respect to my maturer hearers, I would say, Let us not be without the Melody, let us not be without the Eyes. You remember that Praise Psalm (we read it this morning) where it says, “Praise the Lord . . . both young men and maidens; old men, *and children.*” And in one of his prophetic pictures—speaking of the ideal city—the prophet Zechariah has this to say, “And the streets of the city shall be full of *boys and girls* playing in the streets thereof.” To be sure an audience entirely composed of adult men or adult women is very impressive. But, my friends, in the ordinary services of the Church we need the boys and girls—we need the Child in the midst.

Well, I suppose it is not altogether the Children’s fault that they are not here in larger numbers. We can scarcely expect the Children to come, if the Parents don’t come. And mark you this, by the way: don’t send your children to Church,—*bring* them. Why deprive either yourselves or them of your rights and privileges in this matter? If you turn to the Great Book here, you find that the Children are always taken into account. For example, as when Moses says, “These words, which I command this day, shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy *children:*” and again,

"Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God ; your captains . . . , your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your *little ones*, and your wives"—and so on. And there are scores of passages of like import. Many of you know the unspeakable value of the Child in the home,—and the joy and the inspiration of it. Let me tell you, then, the Child is as valuable in the CHURCH,—and as much a source of inspiration there. And let me tell you this also: notwithstanding all the imperfections of our Christian worship and Christian preaching, the Child will get something *here*—something very precious, too, at that—which he cannot get anywhere else. For the House of God has its own distinctive gifts.

"And HE took a Child,
and set him in the midst of them."

XXV

THE MOTHERS

(MOTHER'S DAY)

"Thy mother shall be glad."—PROVERBS XXIII, 25.

THY mother shall be glad!" And who in all the world better deserves to be made glad than one's mother? A mother's gladness, too, is so beautifully unselfish: for it is, almost invariably, on account of her children.

The Bible has a good deal to say about Mothers. There is, for example, the Fifth Commandment ("the first commandment with promise," as St. Paul describes it), "Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the LORD thy God giveth thee." One of the awesome 'curses' in the Book of Deuteronomy is in these terms, "Cursed be he that setteth light by his father or his mother." Then in the account of the Hebrew kings it is said of one and another and another of them, for some mysterious reason, "And his mother's name was" so-and-so. In this Book of Proverbs, besides the words of our text, you have such passages as these: "My son . . . forsake not the law of thy mother," "a foolish son is the heaviness of his mother," and so on. And in the last chapter of Isaiah, which belongs to one of the most eloquent sections of all Scripture, you have that won-

derful suggestion of the Mother-heart of the Eternal—in addition to His Fatherhood, “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you; and ye shall be comforted”

The Mothers of the Bible, too, are an interesting group,—from Eve “the mother of all living” to the mysterious mother of the Book of Revelation who “brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron: and her child was caught up unto God, and to His throne.”

Being an eminently fair and frank transcript of human life, the Bible brings to our notice some mothers who were by no means model mothers. The craftiness of Rebekah, for instance, reproduced in her son Jacob, is scarcely to our liking. Then there was Jezebel, wife of Ahab and mother of Jehoram, who would stick at nothing in the way of bloodshed to gain her own ends, and who was the only individual of either sex of whom the rugged prophet Elijah was afraid. There was Herodias, too, who was responsible for the death of John the Baptist. And one or two others.

But the majority of the Mothers of the Bible are a right good sort. Moses' mother, for instance, with her rare combination of adroitness and affection: to whom the Egyptian princess innocently handed over the little child of the ark of bulrushes, with these words, “Take this child away, and nurse it for me, and I will give thee thy wages.” Then Samuel's mother, with her prayers and her praises,—‘lending’ her son (as she phrased it) ‘lending’ her son to the Lord for life, and caring for him so thoughtfully and so substantially in the days of his novitiate: “moreover his mother made him a little coat, and brought it to him

from year to year, when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice" (what a delightfully human touch!). Then Mary, "the mother of Jesus,"—"blessed . . . among women": with her "My soul doth magnify the Lord, and my spirit hath rejoiced in God my Saviour": amid the 'wonderment' of men and women 'keeping all these things, and pondering them in her heart': with her Divine Son at the beginning of His ministry—on the occasion of the marriage in Cana of Galilee, and with Him at the end of His ministry—

"Near the cross was Mary weeping,
There her mournful station keeping."

Then there were the mothers who "brought young children to Jesus, that He should touch them,"—the predecessors of the tens of thousands of mothers who have been bringing their "young children" to Jesus ever since. Then Eunice—Timothy's mother: "when I call to remembrance," writes Paul to Timothy, you recollect, ("when I call to remembrance) the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice."

Outside of Scripture, too, what a host of good mothers there have been: some of them on the roll of fame!

For example, St. Augustine's mother—Monica: to whose persevering prayers we owe the conversion of her son from a life of subtle worldliness and self-pleasing, and his consequent industry and saintliness. It is told of Garibaldi that in the hottest of his battles he seemed to see his mother on her knees in prayer. John Randolph, "of Roanoke," an American congressman of whom it is said that he

was "distinguished for his eloquence, wit, sarcasm, and eccentricity," wrote, very shortly before his death, to a friend in these terms, "At one period of my life I was on the point of becoming an . . . atheist. I had let go my hold in a great degree of the doctrines of Christianity and of the truths of the Bible, and was about taking the plunge into that dreadful abyss of atheism. I was only held back from it by the recollection that when I was a little child my mother, who is now a saint in heaven, used to make me kneel by her side, and then, taking my little hands between hers, taught me to say, 'Our Father, Who art in heaven.' " And it was Abraham Lincoln who said, "All that I am, or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother."

Indeed, my friends, there is nothing so impresses one, in reading the biographies of the world's great men—I mean the real "helpers and friends of mankind"—(there is nothing so impresses one) in almost every instance as just this: the debt of gratitude we owe to the *mothers* of these men for their finest traits of character. . . . O you Mothers, I wonder if you realize the deep, deep reach and the long, long reach of your influence. I tell you, there is nothing in this world to be compared to it. Living, you can work spiritual miracles in the lives of your children: and, when you are dead, the spiritual miracles will not cease to be wrought by the persuasive power of your fragrant memory.

The Literature of the World, too, has duly honored Motherhood, and has spoken of our Mothers in terms of much appreciation and much beauty.

"The holiest thing alive," writes Coleridge of Mother-

hood.

Tennyson, in "The Princess," after making the Prince tell of the influence of his mother—

"All dipt

"In Angel instincts, breathing Paradise,

"Interpreter between the Gods and men,

"Who look'd all native to her place, and yet

"On tiptoe seem'd to touch upon a sphere

"Too gross to tread, and all male minds perforce

"Sway'd to her from their orbits as they moved,

"And girdled her with music"—

after that passage he makes the Prince add,

"Happy he

"With such a mother! faith in womankind

"Beats with his blood, and trust in all things high

"Comes easy to him, and tho' he trip and fall

"He shall not blind his soul with clay."

One of the most impressive poems I have read recently is the poem entitled "The Daguerreotype," by William Vaughn Moody—a poet of whom this Country has reason to be proud. The poem represents a man studying the portrait of his mother as she was when a girl,—

"My mother as she looked at seventeen."

"

"God, how Thy ways are strange!

"That this should be, even this,

"The patient head

"Which suffered years ago the dreary change!

"That these so dewy lips should be the same

"As those I stooped to kiss

"And heard my harrowing half-spoken name,

"A little ere the one who bowed above her,
"Our father and her very constant lover,
"Rose stoical, and we knew that she was dead."

The man has lived, it would appear, a somewhat disappointing life, has failed to fulfill his mother's ambitions for him: and so—still gazing at the picture—he closes on this wise,

"See, I was yours and I am in the dust.
"Then look not so, as if all things were well!
"Take your eyes from me, leave me to my shame,
"Or else, if gaze they must,
"Steel them with judgment, darken them with blame;
"But by the ways of light ineffable
"You bade me go and I have faltered from,
"By the low waters moaning out of hell
"Whereto my feet have come,
"Lay not on me these intolerable
"Looks of rejoicing love, of pride, of happy trust!
"Nothing dismayed?
"By all I say and all I hint not made
"Afraid?
"O then, stay by me! Let
"These eyes afflict me, cleanse me, keep me yet,
"Brave eyes and true!
"See how the shrivelled heart, that long has lain
"Dead to delight and pain,
"Stirs, and begins again
"To utter pleasant life, as if it knew
"The wintry days were through;
"As if in its awakening boughs it heard
"The quick, sweet-spoken bird.

"Strong eyes and brave,

"Inexorable to save!"

The poem from beginning to end is a thing of great power, as well as great pathos.

Then, to be sure, we have Kipling's famous lines,—so boldly beautiful:

"If I were hanged on the highest hill,
Mother o' mine,
I know whose love would follow me still,
Mother o' mine.

"If I were drowned in the deepest sea,
Mother o' mine,
I know whose tears would come down to me,
Mother o' mine.

"If I were damned of body and soul,
Mother o' mine,
I know whose prayers would make me whole,
Mother o' mine."

And mark you this, my friends: we are encouraged by Christ Himself to hold to the persuasion that *the Love of God is like that*, that the Love of GOD is certainly no less tender, no less patient, no less enduring than the best Mother's love we have ever known. For isn't that the meaning that lies at the heart of such a saying of the Master as this,—“If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, *how much more* shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him!” . . .

But, my friends, I must not forget my little text this morning,—“Thy mother shall be glad.”

What a privilege—to ‘gladden’ the heart of any fellow-human! What a sublime privilege—what a unique privilege,—to gladden a Mother’s heart!

And mark you this, brethren: nothing that the mother herself may do can gladden her heart half so much as some things her children may do. Mothers are very discerning. Their eyes can look us through. God help us, then, to live so that we shall be able to face, without wincing and without a blush of shame, the searching look of our mothers’ understanding eyes. Our mothers, too, are very ambitious for us. They want us to count for something in this world. They want us to win distinction along honorable lines. God help us, then, to make the most of ourselves—to fulfill our mothers’ hopes.

My friends, a Mother’s Love is in a class by itself. There is nothing in the world just like it. It is so pure. It is so patient. It never grows cold, and it never grows old. And, like the Love of GOD, it will go to the utmost limit of suffering and sacrifice. Ay, the Mothers understand the Cross of Christ better than anybody else. Honor, then, to whom honor is due; and, love for love.

One of the blessed compensations of growing old is that, as year is added to year, we come to understand better what our parents have done for us and have been to us, and to appreciate more fully the depth of their devotion. When we were but boys and girls, we didn’t half understand. Thank God for the deeper teachings and the added insight of the silent years.

We sometimes say, “What is Home without a Moth-

er?" And we sometimes speak of the Heavenly Country as Home. Well, I often think that what will make Heaven Home to us will be the simple fact that our Mothers will be there.

"Jesus, in mercy bring us
To that dear land of rest!"

And so, brethren, in our hearts, and in the best ways—the tenderest and the handsomest ways—we know of, let us honor the MOTHERS today! Ay, and not today only; but every day.

"Thy mother shall be *glad*!"

Ah, but there are many *sad* mothers today. Some of them are sad, because, as we have heard the Book saying, 'foolish sons are the heaviness of their mothers.' Others are sad, because their sons have been wounded or killed in battle, or have been brought to early graves by accident or disease. And there are various other reasons.

Verily, we may not forget the sad mothers today. 'We commend them to God, and to the word of His grace.' For we know that the only chance of their hearts being made glad (as it is the only chance of any heart being made abidingly glad) is that they 'dwell in the secret place of the Most High, and abide under the shadow of the Almighty,' and that they receive some new assurance of the Love of GOD—the source and spring of their own love.

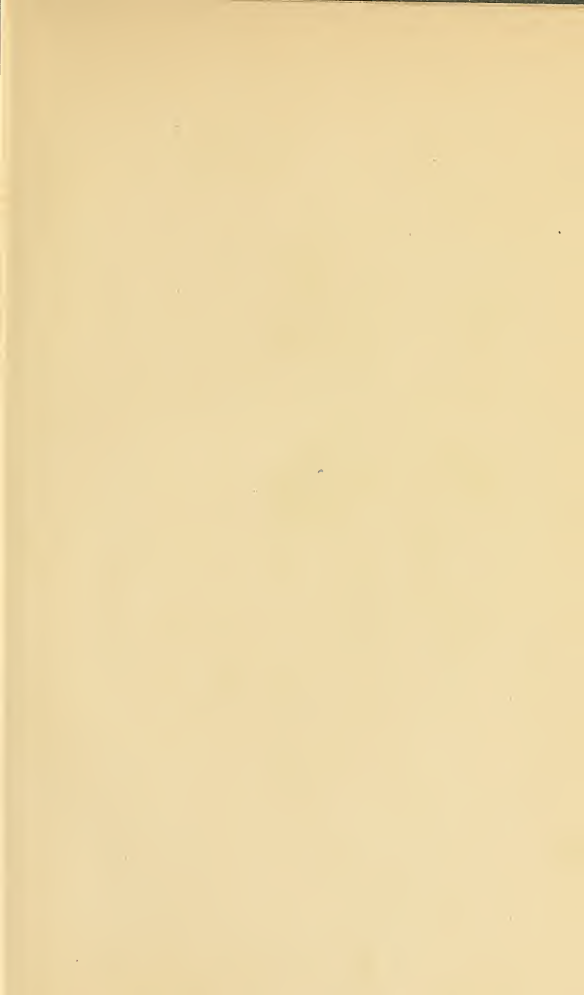
And, my friends, to those of you whose mothers are no longer with you in the flesh I would just say, there is no such thing as a "dead" mother. "They shall see His

face"; and in the light of His countenance and in the inspiration of His nearer presence they love you better than ever and, in wondrous ways, they are ministering to you still. Yes, of their Ministry of Love we may well say,

"Time cannot age it,

Death cannot slay."

God bless our Mothers, then, today—and every day. And in teaching us to love *them* more deeply and to be increasingly loyal to their thoughts of us and their ambitions for us, may the Father of us all make us also "to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward *all men*!"



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